

SODC ward councillor's report

– Shiplake – 8th March 2021

Covid-19

There is now very clear evidence that new cases diminishing. Today marks the return of schools as the first step in the easing of the 3rd lockdown. It is also clear that cases in hospital are reducing although of course there remains pressure – including from waiting lists for a range of other conditions.

At 3/3 Oxford City was at a weekly rate of 46 per 100k population. By comparison Cherwell DC was 39, West Oxon DC at 30, SODC at **28** and Vale of WH DC at 40. Reading BC (to 3rd March) was at 46.

(By comparison see per my January report when I noted:-

*At 5/1, Oxford City was at a weekly rate of 571 per 100k population. By comparison Cherwell DC was 997, West Oxon DC at 428, SODC at **520** and Vale of WH DC at 442. Reading BC (to 5th Jan) was at 627. These numbers have been surging.*

In my February report I noted:-

*At 2/2 Oxford City was at a weekly rate of 228 per 100k population. By comparison Cherwell DC was 185, West Oxon DC at 122, SODC at **121** and Vale of WH DC at 124. Reading BC (to 2nd Feb) was at 292. Note that Reading remains comparatively high by reference to Oxfordshire numbers.*

The vaccine programme continues apace.

The national intent is to get all of the first 4 priority groups first dose done by mid-February (over 70s, clinically highly vulnerable people and healthcare plus social care staff - *around 15m people*) and the first dose for the next 5 groups (down to age 50 - *around 17m people*) by end of May. All adults are expected to have a first dose by end July. The programme will continue with 2nd doses with the aim of reaching all (of age 16+) by end of September. As noted above there may need then to be booster vaccinations for new strains and to maintain antibody levels.

As yet it is believed that having had a vaccination is not a guarantee against being infected by the virus or indeed against passing the virus to others – though it is expected to improve matters.

Testing centres are being opened with a view to improve tracking of the virus and with support from local councils on of these will be in Wantage in Vale of White Horse. Since 23rd February the Beacon in Wantage became a designated Covid-19 testing site for public-facing workers and volunteers who are not displaying symptoms. People in these roles who cannot work from home and do not have access to workplace testing will be able to book a weekly test at the centre. Tests take only 15 minutes with results available within an hour. There is another testing centre in Osney Mead, Oxford.

South and Vale district councils have worked closely with partners across Oxfordshire to help set up these rapid symptom-free testing sites to help stop the spread of the virus, protect the NHS and vital social care services, and ultimately to save lives. Around 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 have no symptoms but can still pass it on and so regular testing of public-facing workers will help to stop the spread of the virus.

Councillor Community Grants

The Shiplake bid for £2,400 has been accepted and, all being well, it is intended to boost this by another £500 as one other parish did not have a bid. (Both joint numbers for David and I together).

(This recognises that last year the Shiplake bid was inhibited.)

New Tree Champions for South Oxfordshire

Following a motion that was passed unanimously by Full Council, SODC has appointed two member Tree Champions – Cllr Peter Dragonetti (Green) and Cllr Ian Snowdon (Conservative). The remit for this role is to:

- Promote the value of trees and woodlands in tackling the climate and ecological emergencies
- Encourage people to re-connect with nature and appreciate the importance of trees and woodlands for both environmental and human health and wellbeing
- Promote woodland protection/conservation and tree growing initiatives in the district
- Work with officers and members to develop and promote a Tree Policy and Strategy
- Raise awareness of the statutory protections for trees and woodland within local communities, town and parish councils.

Ecological Emergency Declared

At the same meeting, the Council declared an Ecological Emergency and has now renamed CEAC as the CEEAC – the Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee. This aligns completely with the top priority Theme in the new Corporate Plan – “Protect and Restore our Natural World”, and provides a strong mandate for officers to work on monitoring, measuring and reducing the ecological impact of our activities, particularly in Planning. A new Biodiversity Steering Group will be established, and SODC will work closely with others (e.g. The Earth Trust) to develop Nature Recovery Networks and a Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire.

OxCam-Arc

You may have seen a recent Government press release about the OxCam Arc -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-plan-to-transform-oxford-cambridge-arc-into-uks-fastest-growing-economic-region>.

This announced “an ambitious plan to unleash the economic and cultural potential of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, to transform it into one of the world’s premier growth corridors and a world-leader in sustainability”. It release a concept of a “Spatial Framework” to be dictated by central government whilst graciously indicating that some consultation with residents and councils would also be entertained. While recognising the contribution made by this region to the UK economy, and the need for a pandemic recovery strategy, the Arc should be contributing research and prototyping to enable growth in the regions and nations of the UK. This framework document aspired to add 1.1 million jobs by 2050 to the just over 2 million that exist now. This rather implies going back to 1 million new homes and the original NIC suggestions? There should also be much more focus on a green recovery and investment in new skills rather than just on economic growth for its own sake. East-West rail is to proceed, but as yet the dreaded Expressway remains ominously “paused”.

Joint Plan (SODC and Vale of White Horse)

For the next Local Plan, there is a proposal to consider a Joint Local Plan for SODC and VoWH.

This would save costs and help officers undertake certain standard activities such as Sustainability Analysis and research on Habitats that are required processes. It could also lead to a joint planning policy book. Each council would still need to approve the Plan. Although governance details have yet to be proposed it is likely that each district would focus on sites in their own area.

(In other planning news, the Civil Aviation Authority gave a strong judgement against the safety of the Chalgrove Airfield site and made it clear that they could not support the application made on behalf of it. The indication was that there was no prospect of the red lined site accommodating both Martin Baker's airfield activities and development.)

Keep safe!

Leigh Rawlins

District Councillor