

SODC ward councillor's report

Shiplake – 11th October 2021

Covid-19

Covid cases are fluctuating around a similar range. A bit lower overall than last month but much higher than at the equivalent time last year - as the Delta (Indian - B.1.617.2) variant continues to make its mark. Overall not a drama, but UK rates are higher than many elsewhere.

At 5/10, Oxford City was at a weekly rate of 364 per 100k population. By comparison, Cherwell DC was 333, West Oxon DC at 351, **SODC at 299** and Vale of WH DC at 276. Reading BC (to 5th October) was at 315. On the plus side these rates are mostly a bit lower than when I reported to you in July.

The vaccine programme continues – with particular focus on the younger groups down to age 16 and completing 2nd doses. Some younger recipients seem hesitant – perhaps influenced by scares on social media.

A booster programme is expected to support those over 70 or who are vulnerable. There will also be a broad-based flu inoculation programme to try to protect the NHS during the winter.

Government are hopeful that we may have seen the worst from known Covid variants. The key seems to be to maintain antibody levels and to protect against flu. The risks of co-infection or twin infection with both flu and Covid are troubling virologists.

New Leader at SODC

At the SODC Council meeting on the 7th October Sue Cooper handed on the leadership of the council to David Rouane – who represents Didcot. Sue brought great experience to the team and has made a great impact – despite the challenges of Covid. Many projects across a wide area of innovation and progress are now emerging from the rather tired slough of the past. Sue will remain in Cabinet – retaining her Climate and Ecology role alongside the Environment portfolio. David steps from the Environment role into that of Leader. My portfolio remains as before but with the addition of in-house Property.

Refuse collection

The national shortage of HGV drivers continues. The Government have made tweaks to their proposals and temporary changes.

Managers at BIFFA are doing their best to recruit more. In the meantime the brown bin garden waste collections have been on temporary stop.

The Brown Bin “Garden Waste” service resumed on 4th October but on a fortnightly cycle. At each collection Biffa will take a full bin and as much again in garden side-waste. Users’ annual subscriptions will be extended by 3 months before a new start-of-year DD payment is taken.

New offices for SODC

Progress is being made on new offices for SODC following the fire that destroyed the Crowmarsh offices in January 2015. The previous administration did all too little to progress matters causing all the insurance money and millions more to be eaten up by the expensive temporary costs of Milton Park. Decisions to progress with more detail are proceeding.

Crowmarsh NP

The Crowmarsh NP was overwhelmingly successful at referendum and has been made by SODC.

Strategic Property Review

SODC's main project to effect a Property Review has successfully completed its primary milestone with all properties listed and with appropriate data assessed and compiled. Unbelievably no such thing has existed for many years – having been badly out-sourced and poorly administered.

Tree Planting

As a first stage SODC have completed a practical tree policy to support increased planting on public land.

Procurement Strategy

For the first time SODC has adopted a formal procurement policy. Whilst various contracts etc policies existed they were not formalised in this better practice.

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Policies & motions

At its meeting on 7th October council progressed necessary decisions (some in confidential session – as advised) and also supported :-

- A) Challenging the excessive growth assumptions for the ARC given :
 - a. Promise to level up the regions
 - b. Highly dubious cost-benefit
 - c. Suggestion of and need for landscape scale nature mapping and recovery
 - d. Decisions SHOULD be made by local democratic means to meet local needs!
- B) Challenging the previously proposed planning reforms noting :-
 - a) The advent of a new Secretary of State
 - b) COP 26
 - c) “Build Back Better” promises for net zero and environmental aims
 - d) Opposition to those “Planning Reforms”. (Please scrap them.)
 - e) Calls to reverse the worst and more recent Permitted Development changes
 - f) The importance of local decisions by democracy
 - g) Need for a sustainable future in our natural world where people can afford to live
 - h) The flaws in the 5 year Housing Land Supply “Standard Method” system
- C) Call for Universal Credit reduction of £20 per week to be stopped. Affects those in greatest need, emerging from worst of Covid and with vast increases in fuel and heating costs. These problems are likely to translate into increased problems for stretched councils.
- D) Call for Oxfordshire CCG to provide more than 2 palliative care beds in Wallingford after the closure of Sue Ryder. The 2 retained beds are supported by GPs – not dedicated staff. Many individuals need support and can't get that at their home!
- E) Highlighting the need to retrofit homes for efficiency. Government have scraped their previous scheme yet there is a clear need for Climate and social reasons. There is payback, but it is not getting done. Skills training and householder support is needed.

Thames Farm

A submission by Taylor Wimpey regarding groundworks and the void-filling has been made and can thus be considered as regards the drainage elements. Having taken advice the position of SODC's professional planning function is that the void-filling of the sinkholes on site will represent major engineering works that go beyond the scope of the original application and will thus need to be the subject of a separate application as regards that; the applicant disputes this finding. The responses of a number of key consultees are outstanding at this stage.

It will be clearly be necessary to take an holistic view of drainage and grouting to reach a judgement on the drainage – with input from key stakeholders and expert consultees. The overall is clearly complex and requires expertise

Keep safe!

Leigh Rawlins

District Councillor