

SODC ward councillors' report

Shiplake – 8th July 2024

General Election

The general election was held on the 4th of July. Of the 650 seats in the House of Commons, 412 were won by Labour, 121 by Conservatives, 72 by Liberal Democrats and 45 by smaller parties. This results in a change of government with Sir Kier Starmer becoming Prime Minister of a new Labour government.

In Oxfordshire, prior to the election Labour held Oxford East, the Liberal Democrats held Oxford West & Abingdon and the Conservatives held the rest. After the election, Labour held Oxford East and won Banbury, the other 5 seats were won by the Liberal Democrats. The 5 seats were :-

- HENLEY & THAME
- Oxford West & Abingdon
- Bicester & Woodstock
- Didcot & Wantage
- Witney

Close around Oxfordshire the LibDems also won :-

- Wokingham
- Maidenhead
- Newbury
- Stratford

In Henley and Thame, the results were as follows :-

Liberal Democrat	45.0% (+12.6%)
Conservative	33.2% (-21.3%)
Reform	9.8% (+ 9.8%)
Labour	6.7% (- 2.2%)
Green	3.8% (- 0.4%)
SDP	1.0% (+1.0%)
Ind	0.6% (+0.6%)

So, our new MP is Freddie Van Mierlo – elected with 23,904 votes and a majority of 6,267.



Freddie (above) at the count – with his letter of appointment! And below with his 4 LibDem colleagues.



National Planning – changes

The new government has indicated significant intended changes to the national planning rules and NPPF.

They intend to re-instate housing targets and to require “up-to-date” Local Plans. It is suggested that the former Conservative planning minister Nick Boles will be invited to help lead a re-write of the NPPF. He was previously keen on driving housing growth but left the Conservative party after the election of Liz Truss as leader and PM. There is interest in enabling cities to grow – including on areas of Green Belt that lack countryside “merit” to be demoted as “Grey Belt”. Also suggestions of creating 30-40 new towns and enforcing use of Brownfield sites and underutilised commercial property to fuel housing provision and support economic growth. Nick Boles and Labour voices have also emphasized needs to get national infrastructure fast-tracked and to ensure that housing comes with the required infrastructure to support it – including drainage and sewage capacity.

Hopefully the changes will support a plan-led system. There is also discussion of ensuring the type of housing that we need – including a new generation of council and social housing. The Secretary of State for Housing and Communities will be Angela Rayner who has emphasized aims for council housing. There has also been some reference to “combined authorities” – indicating planning done more regionally and with top-down targets, details awaited. It is not yet clear if they will be encouraged or required.

South Capital grant scheme goes live this July

Voluntary and community organisations in South Oxfordshire will soon be able to apply for up to £75,000 in funding for projects that help improve people’s quality of life – as SODC prepare to launch the new 2024/25 round of the Capital Grant scheme from 8th July.

SODC have a total budget available of £320,000 to award for capital projects that:

- improve economic and community well-being
- provide infrastructure that meets local need
- protect and restore our natural world
- take action on climate

Organisations can request a minimum of £5,000 and a maximum of £75,000 but no more than 50 per cent of their total project costs – with a total project value of at least £10,000. Details on timings and application information will be on [the SODC grants web page](#).

AONB/National Landscape - Chilterns extension bid

Natural England have indicated that the statutory and public consultation will take place in Autumn/Winter 2024.

If fully resourced, they aim to seek a variation order from the Secretary of State for DEFRA (now Steve Reed) in Winter 2025.

Covid

There have been some indications of an up-tick in cases of Covid. There are a new set of variants collectively known as “FLiRT”, this includes the dominant JN1 variant and the KP2 one. They account for many of the cases in England presently. Variant KP3 has driven a lot of new cases in the USA has also been identified here in small numbers. Whilst debilitating, Covid is not causing large numbers of hospitalisations or deaths.

Funding advice session

SODC are holding a funding advice session at Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot on **18 July: Chinnor Village Centre, appointments available from 1pm-4.30pm.**

If you have a project you'd like to discuss, have any questions about eligibility or the application process for this scheme or our other upcoming grant schemes, you can book a face-to-face meeting.

Places are limited, organisations are encouraged to book a time slot by emailing grants@southandvale.gov.uk or phone 01235 422405. Alternatively, if unable to attend, the team are happy to book a phone call or Teams meeting at a more convenient time.

Summer fun for kids

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are hosting low-cost activities and events for kids at locations across the area from 19 July to 31 August.

For a full run down of what's on and details on how to book, visit southandvale.gov.uk/holidayactivities

Leisure centres across South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse, managed on behalf of the district councils by GLL – branded as “Better”, also have a range of family activities to get involved over the summer holidays. Details about what's available at each centre can be found on [the Better UK website](#) and the leisure centre Facebook pages. The outdoor pools in Abingdon and Wallingford will also be open for those of all ages to enjoy a swim in the sun.

Mike Giles & Leigh Rawlins

District Councillors