

SODC ward councillors' report

Shiplake – 11th November 2024

Community grants - Funding available for community projects in South Oxfordshire

(Repeated as a reminder! The Shiplake pro-rata share would be c£2,400 – combined from Mike and me, albeit that last year incl late changes more came within the parish.)

The deadline for our Councillor Community Grant Scheme is fast approaching. Community organisations, including town and parish councils, have until **midday Friday 29 November** to apply for funding of up to £5,000 from each South Oxfordshire District Councillor.

There are more details about who is eligible to apply, what kind of projects can be funded and the decision process on the grants pages of the South Oxfordshire District Council website southoxon.gov.uk/grants and organisations can contact the Community Enablement team grants@southandvale.gov.uk.

Rethinking Waste

We're entering a new era for rubbish with the launch of the SODC/Vale joint Waste Resources and Street Cleansing strategy.

The new strategy puts a strong emphasis on encouraging and enabling people to reduce, reuse, repair, refill and rehome items - instead of throwing them away.

Everyone can read the strategy and find out more about rethinking waste and the plans to keep our streets clean and tidy at: www.southandvale.gov.uk/rethinkingwaste

Priorities for Oxfordshire's wildlife and nature

Oxfordshire's new local nature recovery strategy, with input from all the districts, is nearly ready, but no one knows better which natural spaces could be improved, restored, or created than the local people who are around them every day. That's where you come in. Please participate! Are the priorities right? Has anything been missed? The Local Nature Recovery Partnership team - based at the county council - would love to [hear what you think](#), please help spread the word.

First habitat bank created in South Oxfordshire

South Oxfordshire District Council is proud to announce it has helped create the first habitat bank in the district - aiming to increase biodiversity and reduce river pollution - while also allowing necessary development.

The council has worked with the environmental charity Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) and a local landowner on plans to transform 16.5 acres off Windmill Lane, Towersey from intensively farmed arable land to a biodiverse mosaic of grassland, scrub, and woodland habitats. This will provide a haven for pollinators such as bees and butterflies, mammals including water voles and birds such as curlews and barn owls.

SODC calls for ‘failing’ Thames Water to return to public control

At its council meeting on 24th October, South Oxfordshire District Council unanimously agreed a resounding vote of no confidence in Thames Water and calling for this particular ‘failing’ water provider to be brought back under public control.

Council members highlighted widespread concerns over Thames Water’s environmental and financial mismanagement and their inability to meet key operational standards affecting residents and local ecosystems.

The council’s motion emphasised the need for government intervention through the Water Industry Act 1991, which allows companies to be placed into Special Administration when they are in financial distress or fail to meet essential duties.

Thames Water loses about a quarter of the region’s public drinking water supply due to its leaks. It is also struggling to manage an £18 billion debt that has led credit agencies Standard & Poor’s and Moody’s to downgrade its debt rating to “junk” status.

SODC call for action to protect local pubs

Mike and Leigh proposed and seconded a motion calling for action to protect local pubs at the SODC Full Council meeting on 24 October.

Nationally pubs are closing at the rate of nearly 1,000 per annum – more than 2% of the UK’s remaining stock.

Based on the unanimously agreed motion, the leader of the council wrote to the chancellor before the autumn budget, calling for the reduction of taxes on pub sales and to extend the hospitality business rates relief scheme.

The Leader will also write to the Deputy Prime Minister calling on her to ensure that pubs are not converted into other commercial or residential uses without explicit support from the community.

The motion reaffirmed a previous motion made over three years ago, which stated that the council would use its powers to “support communities in their efforts to retain pubs”, particularly pubs that were assets of community value, or in opposition to planning applications for change of use.

The council will review its existing policies, including for ACVs to ensure that it is as supportive to pubs as it can within national law and requirements.

Other motions

In two other motions SODC addressed the questions of Local Government finances and the transition to Net Zero.

The first called on the Secretary of State for Communities to fulfill campaign commitments

- to provide local councils with multi-year financial settlements to aid their capacity to plan their finances ahead of time – in line with sound financial management practice.
- To cease the wasteful practice of asking councils to bid for modest pots of funding.

The motion noted that local councils do have great local capacity to support wellbeing, local prosperity and growth – asking government to support those endeavours.

The second asked the Secretary of State to recognise the role of local councils in Net Zero and to support their activity and to clarify powers to support the necessary transition.

Neighbourhood Plans

Following successful referendums SODC's council approved the making of NPs for Binfield Heath, Clifton Hampden, Garsington and Beckley & Stowood.

Complaints procedure

The way SODC deals with complaints is changing. Evidence has shown that SODC's performance has been improving over time and is at a good level. However, following new national guidance from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman, amendments have now been reflected in the SODC refreshed Complaints Policy and Procedure.

You can read the revised policy here: [South](#)

Any complaints will be overseen by the Complaints Manager - complaints@southandvale.gov.uk.

Mike Giles & Leigh Rawlins

District Councillors