

## District Councillor Report, March 2022

Cllr Jo Robb, Cllr Lorraine Hillier

### Ukraine

South Oxfordshire District Council stands by the people of Ukraine in the face of the horrific and ongoing invasion by Russia. Our thoughts are with everyone affected.

We will help in any way we can, working with local partners, including resettling refugees locally. We are yet to receive details of any scheme to house Ukrainian refugees but will be ready to support as soon as asked.

Guidance on government support to Ukrainian nationals and their family members, including the Ukraine family scheme can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/support-for-family-members-of-british-nationals-in-ukraine-and-ukrainian-nationals-in-ukraine-and-the-uk>

The best way to support Ukraine at the moment is to donate money through established charities. Organisations such as the Disasters Emergency Committee and the Red Cross have the logistics and specialist staff on the ground to respond to the crisis with what is needed.

If you are donating to less well-known charities, check the charity's name and registration number at [www.gov.uk/checkcharity](http://www.gov.uk/checkcharity)

### 2022/2023 Budget

The SODC budget was approved by Council on 17<sup>th</sup> Feb so we can now focus on delivering plans for the projects identified for the second full year of our current Corporate Plan. The council successfully reduced the budget deficit by £1.5m, primarily through bringing the finance and accounting functions back in-house from Capita, agreeing to proceed a Joint Local Plan, serving notice on the expensive Milton Park offices and through addressing revenue shortfalls by increasing fees and charges.

The proposed increase in the SODC portion of the Council Tax (a £5 increase to £136.24 for a Band D property) is less than the current rate of inflation. NB last year's national average Council Tax for shire districts was £198.96

As part of the budget-setting process for 2022/23, a prioritised list of projects which will use the SODC portion of CIL funds has been created; this new approach will ensure that 3<sup>rd</sup> party funds are used wherever possible for major projects, thus reducing the demand on the Council's reserves. The majority of these projects relate to the District's leisure centres, the Riverside pool, campsite and other facilities in Wallingford, upgrading toilet facilities across the district, tree planting projects, applying for Bathing Water Status for Wallingford, and the purchase of housing for social rent.

This year's budget also includes additional investment of £500k to kickstart some of the priority projects which were delayed by Covid, with an extra £200k going into the delivery of the Climate Action Plan and more funds going into improving both our natural, built and social environment.

All Council grant schemes have been funded at previous levels in the 2022/23 budget, so look out for announcements about their opening and closing dates later in the year. Our Councillor Grants were heavily oversubscribed this year and we sadly had to turn away applicants. However, the Community Grants team are happy to work with parishes and community groups to find funding for projects so do let us know if you require assistance.

## **Council Tax and Energy Bill Rebate**

You have probably seen the [announcement](#) about the measures the Government is taking to help protect households from rising energy costs. This includes a £200 Energy Bills Rebate and a £150 Council Tax Energy Rebate.

Households in England, which are in council tax bands A-D, will receive a £150 rebate. The rebate to bills will be made by local authorities to households from April directly rather than through the Council Tax system. This will not need to be repaid. This one-off payment will benefit around 80 per cent of all homes in England.

On top of this discount, discretionary funding of £144 million will also be provided to support vulnerable people and individuals on low incomes who do not pay Council Tax, or who pay Council Tax for properties in Bands E-H.

## **Joint design guide consultation extended**

We've extended the deadline for responses to our draft Joint Design Guide consultation. The Joint Design Guide sets out the steps and design principles to be followed when designing a scheme for planning permission. It follows best practice and demonstrates how high quality and sustainable developments can be achieved. Additionally, it ensures that identity, character and heritage landscapes are preserved and enhanced.

To help people understand what the guide is and the principles it contains, we've created an [easy-to-use website](#) dedicated to it.

Following some initial technical issues with the site, we have extended the consultation deadline to Tuesday 15 March. Find out more on our [South](#) websites.

## **Two more consultations launched recently**

We've recently launched two consultations about how we plan to raise funds for facilities and infrastructure in South Oxfordshire to support housing growth in the district. We know this is an important topic for many residents, and it is one of our council priorities. The first consultation relates to the **Community Infrastructure Levy** or CIL – this is essentially a local charge that the council can choose to apply to new development in our district. As you know, the money raised can be used to fund a wide range of local infrastructure such as transport schemes, community or health facilities, parks, green spaces and leisure facilities. The consultation proposes some increases in the CIL charges and a differentiated approach to different parts of the district (e.g. Berinsfield compared to Henley).

The second consultation relates to the review of our Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (or SPD), which identifies how the council will ensure new development contributes to the provision of infrastructure such as roads, schools, community facilities, leisure facilities and open space, through what are known as 'Section 106 Agreements'.

All open consultations are listed on the SODC website at <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/about-the-council/get-in-touch/consultations/live-consultations/>

## **Letter to Rt Hon Michael Gove MP on the 5 year Housing Land Supply Rules**

On 31<sup>st</sup> January all of the leaders of the 6 Oxfordshire authorities (instigated by SODC Leader David Rouane) [wrote to Michael Gove](#) at DHLUC to express their concerns about the 5-yr HLS system, which is in urgent need of review and completely unfit for purpose. All Oxfordshire MPs were also copied and some have responded positively.

## **SODC Site in Crowmarsh**

We understand that at last an options paper is due to come to Cabinet in the next month or so.

## **Enforcement**

The enforcement team are moving over to the new triage system agreed by Council last year and hosted a successful session with parish councils to explain the new scheme. Parish Councils and residents can report breaches on the Enforcement pages of the website. If residents would like to make a report anonymously, they should do so through their Parish Council or District Councillor.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/planning-and-development/planning-enforcement/>