

District Councillor Update

2 April 2024

Jo Robb and James Norman

Some council car park fees to change from April 1

New fees for car parks in South Oxfordshire are being introduced from April 1. The car park fees are being simplified and rounded to the nearest whole pound while all car parks will continue to have a period of free parking. This means some of the fees are being reduced by up to 16 percent while other will see modest increases. Parking permits rates have also been frozen.

The additional parking income from the rises means we can match the cost of managing and running our car parks, otherwise we'd have to divert funding from other council services to subsidise car parking.

All funds from car parking fees and permits are invested back into providing the service and making improvements to car parks, highways, public conveniences and public open spaces, as well as developing infrastructure to encourage active travel – such as cycle paths and bike storage.

Parking for the first hour remains free in all Didcot, Thame and Henley public car parks.

There is a growing body of evidence that shows that while business owners believe that as cost increases, footfall decreases, in fact, the towns/cities with the highest footfall generally have higher than average parking charges. Furthermore, fair car park charges can help ensure that parking spaces frequently turn over, increasing overall footfall. You can see the full fees on our parking policy webpage.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/parking-roads-and-streets/parking/parking-policy/>

Henley Disability Open Day

Henley Leisure Centre is opening its doors to disabled residents on Sunday 21 April from 10am-2pm. There will be a range of FREE activities and sports modified for disabled residents and their families to have a go at something new.

Better, our leisure centre contractor, has partnered with Regatta for the Disabled. Henley Leisure Centre has accessible parking spaces, changing rooms and toilets. Parents and carers of participants under 18 years are required to stay at the venue.

Included will be:

10:00 - 11:00 - Learning disability tennis/boccia/new age kurling

11:00 - 12:00 - Pan disability football

12:00 - 13:00 - Wheelchair rugby taster – open to all those with disabilities including neurodiverse conditions. Wheelchairs provided. Family members are welcome to join in!

13:00 - 14:00 – swimming

Make use of the Henley leisure centre swimming pool inclusive of pool hoist for some lengths or family fun.

Any questions can be directed to Kate Mulrey at henley@gll.org

<https://www.better.org.uk/leisure-centre/south-oxfordshire/henley-leisure-centre/news/henley-disability-open-day>

Please do publicise this amazing day among your residents!

Empty Homes Policy

The council's commitment to tackling our social housing waiting list and to making sure local families have somewhere to live has led to the approval of a new Empty Homes Policy.

The focus will be on working positively with the owners of empty homes to bring homes back into occupation, in particular for those in most need.

There are reasons why a property might be empty in the short-term but long-term empty properties are not a good use of a valuable resource and may have a negative impact on their local area.

The empty homes policy sets out the incentives available to home owners to bring homes back into use to the benefit of the owner, potential tenants, and the wider community.

Enforcement action will normally only be considered as a last resort when empty home owners are unwilling to engage and the property is causing problems for the community.

If you are the owner of an empty property and would like to discuss the incentives available to bring your property back into use, please email our private sector housing team at psh@southandvale.gov.uk

You can also email our private sector housing team at the address above to report any issues concerning empty homes in your area. Please provide us with both your details and the details of the property.

You can read the new policy here: <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/03/Empty-Homes-Policy.pdf>

Earn Extra Cash – Be a Polling Station Clerk!

We are still looking for people to work as poll clerks and presiding officers on Thursday 2 May for the Police and Crime Commissioner election.

Please do encourage residents to register their interest – they could earn up to £233 for a day's work and though tiring, it is fun and interesting to be at the coalface of the democratic process. Just search "poll clerks" on the SODC website.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/local-democracy-and-elections/elections-and-voting/working-elections-2/>

Police and Crime Commissioner election

Many people don't realise the Police and Crime Commissioner even exists, others believe it shouldn't. The post is democratically elected and pays £86,700 a year. The job of the PCC is to make sure Thames Valley Police is an effective police force that delivers on the priorities of local residents.

A large chunk of your council tax goes to Thames Valley Police so do have your say in the PCC elections!

The election takes place on 2 May, full details on the SODC elections webpage.

- To vote in this election, you must be registered at your current address by 16 April - visit the national voter registration page - www.gov.uk/register-to-vote
- To vote at a polling station you must bring photo ID - a wide range of photo ID will be accepted, including passports, driving licences and cards with a PASS Mark.
- Anyone who doesn't have the accepted photo ID should apply NOW for a free voter ID document known as a Voter Authority Certificate. The deadline for this election is 5pm on 24 April – just visit the Electoral Commission website.

You can find out more here:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/local-democracy-and-elections/elections-and-voting/current-and-upcoming-elections/pcc-election-2024/>

Service Changes at Oxford Bus Company

Oxford Bus Company has announced they are making some changes to services in Oxford City and South Oxfordshire from 14 April 2024. Find out more and view the changes services on the Oxford Bus Company website. The changes to the X40 River Rapids service may affect you so do check before you set off.

<https://images-oxfordbus.passenger-website.com/downloads/X40%20booklet%20apr24%20v2%20web.pdf>

Fly tipping

I have noticed a significant increase in the amount of fly tipped waste on our country lanes and B roads. If you see fly tipped waste, please report it to Biffa – FixMyStreet no longer accepts reports of fly tipping.

Please call Biffa on 03000 610 610 or email: admin.southoxford@biffa.co.uk with details of where you saw the waste, the type of waste and when you spotted it. There is a form you can fill in (if you like forms) on the fly tipping pages on the council's website.

Our Envirocrime team can then be dispatched to investigate. The council has a successful track record of prosecuting fly tippers so please do report!

Easter Bins and Waste Survey

Bins are being emptied a day later to account for the Easter holiday weekend. Please check the waste calendar to find out when your bin is due to be collected:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/when-is-your-collection-day/waste-collections-calendar/>

Waste Satisfaction Survey

We are inviting residents to take part in our latest survey to tell us what they think of our waste services – that includes waste and recycling, food waste collections and street cleaning services.

<https://theconversation.southandvale.gov.uk/housing-and-environment/waste-survey-2024/>

The survey closes on 24 April, please do take a few minutes to share your views.

We're taking a snapshot of opinion on a regular basis to monitor how satisfaction levels change over time and identify areas for improvement – our most recent check-in was in the summer last year when we received over 2,000 responses – view the report here.

<https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Waste-Satisfaction-Survey-2023-Summary-Report.pdf>

Community Infrastructure Fund

Town and parish councils and not-for-profit community groups have until Friday 5 April 2024 to submit expressions of interest for the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Grant Fund.

Through this pilot program, we're looking to fund infrastructure projects required as a direct result of development in South Oxfordshire, with between £75,000 to £250,000 of funding

available per project. Find out more, view the guidance document and submit an EOI through the Community Infrastructure Levy Grant Fund webpage.

Town and Parish Council Survey on Climate Action

Please do complete the survey on how the district council can support your parish to take action on climate and nature:

<https://theconversation.southandvale.gov.uk/policy-and-programmes/67517663/>

We have already:

- given funds and support to climate projects across the districts
- helped organisations save thousands in energy costs
- reduced carbon emissions
- had a positive impact on local nature recovery.

The survey for town and parish councils will close at 11:59pm on Thursday 18 April.