

District Councillor Update

13 May 2024

Cllrs Jo Robb, James Norman

Good News Alert: Bathing Water Status for Wallingford!

Following hard work by the local community led by Thames21, Wallingford was granted bathing water status by DEFRA last week. This is wonderful news and is especially pleasing for Jo, who as River Thames Champion, first proposed the idea to SODC and started working towards it, in 2020. Bathing Water Status means that the Environment Agency will test the water at Wallingford Beach on a weekly basis during the bathing season for faecal bacteria and make the results of these tests public. This will enable members of the public to make an informed choice about whether or not to swim. It will also impose higher standards on Thames Water to treat its effluent to human health standards at sewage treatment works in the “plume of influence” of the bathing area. This would mean upgrades at Benson and elimination of faecal bacteria from the STW at Dorchester making the river much cleaner for swimmers at Dorchester meadows too. Bathing Water status is an excellent tool in the kit to support the restoration of our rivers for people and nature but it’s of little use in areas where people don’t bathe, such as in smaller rivers like the Thame, the Evenlode, the Kennett, the Pang or the Lambourn. We need proper enforcement against polluters and investment in our infrastructure to restore our rivers to health.

This year, Thames21 will be working on a bathing water status application for Pangbourne Meadows. Residents can get involved with the process of water quality testing which will include testing at Goring. Do get in touch if you are interested in taking up the stainless steel bucket and testing pots and taking up the growing hobby of water quality testing this summer!

Garden Waste Scheme Changes

The council has been working to implement changes to the garden waste subscription service. Last month, the transition period towards a new permit scheme began.

The scheme will come into force in April 2025.

When a customer’s invoice is due, you will receive information on the changeover, what to expect and what you’ll need to do in early 2025 should you want to continue with the garden waste service.

Please check the council’s website: <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/garden-waste/garden-waste-scheme-changes/> for more information and frequently asked questions.

Police and Crime Commissioner Elections

Matthew Barber (Conservative) has been re-elected as Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley. Turnout in South Oxfordshire was 21.39% and in Vale of White Horse, 21.94%. Mr Barber was elected with 144, 092 votes with Tim Starkey of Labour

coming in second place with 141,749 votes. In South Oxfordshire, Mr Barber won with 8085 votes against Tim Bearder (Lib Dem) with 6410 and Tim Starkey with 6142.

New Housing Enforcement Policy

The council has a strong track record of engaging positively with landlords and the majority provide a good service to their tenants. However, where necessary, we must take robust action against rogue landlords who are unwilling to meet the required housing standards.

A new Housing Enforcement Policy will set out clear requirements when it comes to housing standards and will provide clarity around the approach to housing enforcement for non-co-operating landlords.

The policy supports our corporate objectives to help us provide homes and infrastructure that meet local needs. It also builds upon the work already being undertaken by our Private Sector Housing team to promote and maintain good housing standards in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

You can view the policy on our website: <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/housing/housing-delivery-strategy/housing-enforcement-policy/>

New online training course for small businesses

The Department for Business and Trade has launched the Help to Grow: Management Essentials course, a FREE online course with practical tips and resources for small business leaders. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-new-free-business-management-course-for-small-businesses>

Essentials is the latest addition to the 'Help to Grow' toolkit supporting UK small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/export-advice-for-smes-doing-business-in-the-uk-and-overseas/doing-business-in-the-uk-toolkit-for-small-businesses>

The course is suited for leaders of newer or smaller SMEs, or those who are looking to explore the principles of business growth and management. Business leaders can access the course through the Help to Grow website.

Please help share this information with any small businesses you know in the area.

Let it Bee

Following the success of the Let It Bee trial last year, the council's Parks team is pushing ahead with a biodiversity-friendly land management programme, where we allow grass to grow on sections of land we own or manage. This year, there are unmown sites in Benson, Berinsfield, Didcot, Shepherds Green, Wallingford, Wantage and Woodcote.

As we support No Mow May and after the success of our 'Let It Bee' trial last year, our Parks team is pushing ahead once again with a biodiversity-friendly land management

programme, where we allow grass to grow on sections of land we own or manage. This year we have sites across the districts in Abingdon, Benson, Berinsfield, Botley, Didcot, Faringdon, Marcham, Shepherds Green, Wallingford, Wantage, and Woodcote. For more information please see our grass cutting pages on our website:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/parking-roads-and-streets/grounds-maintenance/grass-cutting/>

The council has sought to maintain a balance between unmown areas and mown areas for play, ball games and picnics.

Please let us know your thoughts so that I can feed these back to the officers.