

## District Councillor Update

July 2022

Jo Robb & Lorraine Hillier

### Financial Support for Fuel Costs

The £150 payment to homes in council tax bands A-D is now largely complete, and the focus is has moved on to working out a basis for discretionary grants to households in homes Bands E and above.

There was quite a lot of pressure on the phonedlines handling this matter, with many thousands of homes it takes just a very small proportion with questions and difficulties to keep the phones lines very busy. **If you or a resident require support with a council tax issue, do let us know and we can escalate with the appropriate officers.**

### Household Support

A voucher support scheme has opened for households who cannot afford to pay for life's essentials. This includes help for children eligible for free school meals through the holidays, as well as pensioner households. With limited funds, preference is given to people who have not had support from it before, but the funds are not restricted to people in receipt of benefits. Details on [www.southoxon.gov.uk/household-support-fund](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/household-support-fund)

### Ukrainian Refugees

SODC is part of a county wide rematching scheme set up to find accommodation for Ukrainian guests in situations when sponsorship arrangements cannot continue, or DBS or accommodation checks have failed. A budget for temporary accommodation has been established though the focus is on ensuring arrangements don't break down in the first place. Ukraine queries can be directed to [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ukraine](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ukraine), and there is also a weekday working hours phone helpline.

The Ukraine refugee scheme will now allow unaccompanied children and minors under 18; the rules are much more stringent to protect these refugees. Again, information on the Oxfordshire County Council website.

### EV Charging – Rural Parishes

The EV charging points are now up and running in council-owned carparks in town centres. There will be empty spaces until the take-up of EVs increases in towns but we expect this won't last long (assuming people can obtain a car!) The focus is now shifting to supporting rural parishes that would like EV charging in their carparks.

An information webinar is happening aimed at parishes looking to install electric vehicle charging. It's on Wednesday 20 July at 2pm and is free to attend via this link:

[https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_cJ6DDZojQFSBrmZMs68Vrw](https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_cJ6DDZojQFSBrmZMs68Vrw)

OCC is also conducting a survey of rural parishes looking at the possibility of installing EV chargers: [Are you interested in putting electric vehicle \(EV\) chargers in your town/parish car parks? \(google.com\)](https://www.google.com)

Please let us know if you'd like to be put in direct touch with the relevant officers.

## **Councillor Grant Scheme**

This has now reopened with a new round of funding, with the deadline for applications being midday on 2 September. We tend to distribute all our funds so please get in touch with your requests and be sure to seek advice from [grants@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:grants@southandvale.gov.uk) as early as possible. Information of course is also on the council website at [www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants)

## **Fly tipping – Fix My Street**

Regular users of FixMyStreet to report fly tipping may have been frustrated to see that FMS cut out the fly tipping service some weeks ago. The County Council did this without warning so SODC are working to resolve the issue. The team at SODC are excellent at picking up fly tips, and an officer will also turn out to rummage through the waste to look for evidence to identify who is responsible and potentially lead to a prosecution. Flytips can be reported to Envirocrime: [Envirocrime@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:Envirocrime@southandvale.gov.uk)

## **Planning Enforcement**

The enforcement team are continuing to work according to the new enforcement statement and triaging system which ensures that alleged breaches are assessed according to clear criteria and the most serious and urgent matters prioritised. A report on enforcement is expected to come to Scrutiny in late July.

The Planning Inspectorate refused an appeal against an enforcement action that SODC had taken against an unauthorised development in Rotherfield Greys. An “artists studio” was developed that went far beyond the approved plans, plans which had been applied for over several years. The appellant now has 12 months to appeal the decision of the inspectorate.

[Appeal decisions.pdf](#)

## **Taxi Tariffs**

SODC has now fallen into line with many other councils, and adopted a tariff rate for taxi cabs. To some extent, this is in response to concerns over excess charging at high profile local events. The tariffs will come into force on 4 August, assuming no objections to the statutory consultation are received, and will apply only to Hackney Carriages, not private hire vehicles and on journeys that start and finish in South Oxfordshire.

## **Joint Design Guide**

The Joint Design Guide came before the Joint Scrutiny Committee in late June. Jo pointed out that while there were excellent policies on trees, there was very little on hedgerows which are just as important (if not more important) than trees in terms of biodiversity, landscape and amenity.

The Guide has now been amended to include reference to hedgerows and boundary treatments. There was also little reference to Dark Skies and happily, reference to dark skies has also been beefed up. However, the Joint Design Guide is a document that supports the legacy Local Plan which has no policies on dark skies and very little on hedgerows. So, until we have policies in our Joint Local Plan there is not much we can do beyond “encouraging” applicants/developers to incorporate these considerations in their designs. It’s pleasing to see that our planning officers are

encouraging applicants towards dark sky friendly designs and measures, following last year's council motion.

### **Bathing Water Status for Wallingford**

As River Thames Champion, Jo has been working for the past two years towards SODC making an application for Bathing Water status for Wallingford Beach. The council is now working in partnership with Thames 21, who are leading on the technical aspects of the project. Water testing for faecal bacteria will take place weekly over the summer, across 8 sites between Abingdon and the Wallingford edge road. The results of this testing will form part of a body of evidence that will be submitted to DEFRA before 31 October, in support of the Bathing Water Status application. If successful, Wallingford will be only the third stretch of river in the country to have Bathing Water Status. Designation means that the Environment Agency is required to test the water for bacteria throughout the bathing season and SODC will be required to make public this information. This will enable river users to make an informed choice about whether the water is clean enough for bathing. It also gives us greater power to pressure Thames Water to upgrade the treatment works upstream, at Benson.

A volunteer training day on Thursday June 6 in Wallingford was a huge success with large numbers of enthusiastic volunteers learning how to take water samples and finding out more about pollution in our local rivers. We do require more volunteers to help with surveying – counting numbers of people using the site and asking some questions. If you have some spare time over the summer, and happen to travel to Wallingford occasionally, do get in touch with Stephen Haywood from Thames21: [stephen.haywood@thames21.org.uk](mailto:stephen.haywood@thames21.org.uk)