

**SODC District Councillors' Report  
2 September 2019**

**Cllr Jo Robb  
Cllr Lorraine Hillier**

**Emerging Local Plan 2034**

The leader of the council and cabinet members have had meetings with members of OCC, Highways and MHCLG regarding the impact on the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) of withdrawing the Emerging Local Plan 2034 from the inspectors.

Clear answers have not yet been forthcoming and there is no clarity on the impact of reducing housing numbers in certain sites (eg in Culham or Berinsfield) on the HIF.

Loss of the HIF money will mean that some key sites already allocated under the Core Strategy cannot come forward and so South Oxfordshire and the Vale could both lose their five-year housing land supply and be open to speculative development.

The HIF relates mainly to new roads around Didcot.

It is important to note that under the Emerging Local Plan 2034, which plans for some 28,000 new homes in the district, South Oxfordshire will lose its five-year housing land supply in 2021/22 and 2023/24.

As a result of this uncertainty, the cabinet and full council meetings scheduled for this month (September) have been cancelled and deferred to October. This is to enable cabinet, council and scrutiny to make their decisions based on full facts.

Council will meet on 10 October to decide on a course of action on the Local Plan.

**Audit of accounts and Budget 2020/21**

Our unaudited financial accounts for 2018/19 are now available online on our website.

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/about-us/how-we-work/our-finances/statement-accounts-0>

This year, our audited accounts were not available by the 31 July deadline due to a delay by our external auditors. They have written to both South and Vale councils in a joint letter to explain the reasons for the delay and have let us know that the audits will now take place later this month or in September.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/jgs3a1ttrggbe63/South%20%20Vale%20Reschedule%20letter%20130619.pdf?dl=0>

Once the accounts are audited, we will publish them on our websites.

## **Budget**

The budgeting process begins this month and the council will begin drafting its new medium-term financial plan. The District, in common with councils across the country, is in difficult financial straits.

Over the past five years the council has been taking an average of £2m per annum from usable reserves in order to balance its budget. At this rate, the usable reserves will last seven years.

David Turner, cabinet member with responsibility for finance, and William Jacobs, the council's head of finance, have asked for all cabinet members to work alongside heads of service to identify savings and potential ways of increasing revenue through fees and charges. New projects should seek external sources of funding.

It should be noted that the average council tax charge in Shire District councils for a Band D property is £186 compared with SODC which charges £122 for a Band D property.

## **Grants**

The Councillor Grant Scheme has opened again. Under the scheme, each Councillor has a budget of £5,000 to award to projects or services that will benefit our communities.

Councillors can award between £250 and £5000 to a project - examples might include new play equipment, installation of solar panels or accessibility improvements for a community facility. Applicants CAN approach more than one councillor if their project supports residents across a larger area.

Projects must be complete within 12 months of the award decision. The scheme closes on **10 January 2020**.

Apply through the website: [www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants)

## **Electric Blanket Testing**

As autumn approaches and temperatures fall, residents might be thinking about getting out their electric blankets. Oxfordshire County Council Trading Standards and Fire & Rescue Service are offering free electric blanket tests. Safety test sessions take place in Henley on Wednesday 23 October, Henley Town Hall.

To book a safety check, please phone 01865 895 999 or email

[communityengagement@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:communityengagement@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

### **Fly-Tipping**

A Bix resident raised concerns about the imposition of charges for disposing of waste at Council recycling centres. Similar concerns have been raised by Keep Britain Tidy and the Telegraph and Sun newspapers.

Figures obtained under Freedom of Information show there has been an increase in fly tipping nationally since the introduction of charges, there is no definitive evidence to show the increase is as a direct result of these fees.

SODC's Environmental Services department said: "We work proactively on enforcement wherever we obtain evidence and have had significant successes over the last few years. During the investigations and interviewing process, the introduction of charges hasn't been shown to be a factor as to why someone has fly tipped."

Fly tipping does not result in a specific clearance cost to the District Council as the contract with Biffa is all-inclusive and covers the removal of fly-tipping.

### **Lighting at Highlands Park**

A Rotherfield Greys resident last week complained about the installation of Victorian style street lamps on this development and along Highlands Lane. The planning officer has confirmed that this may constitute a breach of the planning condition on lighting and will contact the developer and enforcement. I will keep you updated.

### **The Lamb at Satwell**

Unfortunately, there has been a further delay on this enforcement matter. The enforcement officer sought the advice of the legal team to obtain a warrant to enter the premises. He was advised that he would have to make a further attempt to enter the site with the consent of the owner in order for a magistrate to issue a warrant.

The officer has a number of other enforcement matters in court at the moment so will not be able to visit The Lamb until October. I will let you know of any developments as and when they happen.

### **Greys Fete**

A terrific day was enjoyed by all who attended. Congratulations to the organising committee for such a wonderful community event.

### **Jo Robb and Lorraine Hillier**