

District Councillor Update

4 September 2022

Cllr Jo Robb

Cost of Living Crisis

1. Cost of Living Clinic:

The District Council and BBC Radio Oxford co-hosted a Cost of Living Clinic in Didcot over the August Bank Holiday weekend. Oxfordshire Mind, Citizens Advice, Didcot Food Bank, Didcot Larder, SOFEA, officers and councillors from South Oxfordshire District Council and other organisations were on hand to provide residents with advice and support.

A clinic in Abingdon will follow later this month (19 September) and it's hoped that clinics will be rolled out elsewhere in the District later this year.

The clinic follows the Council's declaration of a Cost of Living Emergency at Full Council in July. We await the new Prime Minister's plans to deal with what is likely to be a terrible winter for many of our residents and local businesses.

The Council is calling for urgent action from government including: a review of the energy cap regime to ensure that it provides much greater protection to consumers; an immediate reduction to VAT; an increase in benefits in line with inflation; reinstating the Universal Credit Uplift, providing immediate support for public transport; and increase funding to local authorities which are facing inflationary pressures.

As we await an announcement from government, the Council has produced a useful guide. Please could you circulate this among your residents and make it available in public places?

[Cost of living help Leaflet.pdf](#)

And as ever, please direct residents to our Community Hub where officers can guide residents to the support that's available: 01235 422 600 or communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk

Full details are available on our Cost of Living page on the website: [Cost of living help - South Oxfordshire District Council \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](#)

2. Household Support Fund

Regrettably, our portion of the Household Support Fund has been spent and is now open only to pensioners. Government guidance requires us to put aside a third of the funds for pensioners so with the main tranche now all accounted for, only pensioners are eligible for the remainder. Any pensioners struggling to pay their household bills are encouraged to get in touch with the Community Support team who can guide them through the application process.

Applications close on 30 September.

3. Rough Sleeping and Housing Support

We are receiving growing numbers of reports of people rough sleeping in the District and we can expect these numbers to increase further. Our Housing Team are expert at supporting people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness and our Council follows the Housing First approach: first provide people with a roof over their heads and additional support follows. [About Housing First | Housing First England \(homeless.org.uk\)](#)

Please contact: housing@southandvale.gov.uk or call 01235 422 452 or let us know if you would like to discuss a housing issue or have concerns about a resident who is homeless or about to be.

Oxfordshire 2050

The Oxfordshire Plan 2050, a County-wide plan for growth and development, has collapsed after the Districts and City failed to reach agreement on housing numbers. Three “growth” scenarios were proposed by independent consultants: the Standard Method, “business as usual” which reflected current high rates of housing growth and a “transformational” scenario. Oxford City was seeking housing numbers in excess of those projected under the “transformational” scenario while South and Vale and West Oxfordshire wanted to see growth in line with the Standard Method for calculating housing need and a focus on absorbing and providing for the high levels of housing growth that have already been committed in existing local plans.

Some £2.5m of government money was spent on the 2050 Plan but these funds were earmarked specifically for Oxfordshire 2050 so could not have been spent elsewhere. The key County-wide groups including: the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Climate Group, the Affordable Housing Group, the Infrastructure Group and the Local Nature Partnership will continue to operate. Much of the work previously done under Oxfordshire 2050 will now simply be absorbed by local authorities in the drafting of their own Local Plans (including South & Vale’s Joint Local Plan).

Planning News

A planning appeal on a speculative application for 350 new houses at Cholsey, refused by the District Council, has been called in by the Secretary of State for determination. The reason for the call-in has been stated as: “the appeal involves proposals for residential development of over 150 units or on sites of over 5 hectares, which would significantly impact on the Government’s objective to secure a better balance between housing demand and supply and create high quality, sustainable, mixed and inclusive communities.”

Cholsey Parish Council has vociferously opposed the application on the grounds that it fails to comply with their Neighbourhood Plan and the area lacks the infrastructure to cope with a development of this scale. A reminder that South Oxfordshire has 5.58 years of housing land supply, and an up-to-date local plan.

[Update on Papist Way development – Cholsey Parish Council](#)

Councils Withdraw from Ox-Cam Arc Project

South and Vale leaders have agreed that they do not support proposals for a pan-regional development and growth partnership across the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. Cllr David Rouane, leader of SODC, wrote to Cllr Barry Wood confirming that South Oxfordshire will not be involved in the

continuation of the Arc, a scheme that at one stage mooted a million new houses and an Expressway between the two cities. Instead, Cllr Rouane suggests focusing scarce funds on supporting residents through the cost of living crisis and partnership working with local authority neighbours in our area. You can read Cllr Rouane's letter here: [Address \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk)

Protecting our Rivers: Bathing Water for Wallingford

Volunteers have been conducting water quality testing at eight sites along the River Thames from Abingdon Bridge to Nosworthy Way in Wallingford, as part of the partnership project led by Thames21 and funded by South Oxfordshire District Council. The test results will form part of an evidence base to support an application for Bathing Water Status at Wallingford Beach, a well-known swimming area that has been enjoyed by local residents and visitors for generations.

Should the application for Bathing Water Status be successful, the Environment Agency would be required to test the water in and around the bathing area for faecal bacteria and to make the results of these tests public. Bathing Water designation also requires the sewage undertaker (Thames Water) to treat effluent to "human health" standards thus giving greater powers to bring about improvements to treatment works that impact the bathing area. Cllr Jo Robb has been working with Thames 21 to roll out bathing areas in other locations along our stretch of the Thames, including at Pangbourne Meadows (opposite Whitchurch).

If you have any photos of Wallingford Beach this summer, please send them to us – they could prove useful in establishing that the Beach is widely used and popular (one of the criteria set by DEFRA for Bathing Water Status). And please be sure to complete the consultation survey and help Wallingford to become only the third stretch of river in the country to be designated as a Bathing Water:

[Wallingford Beach Bathing Waters project - Thames21](#)

Following from the motion to Council calling for more transparency from Thames Water around sewage treatment work capacity and asking for better alignment between planning and infrastructure investment, Cllr David Rouane has written to the Environment Agency asking for stronger action on sewage discharges. The EA's response can be read here: [220809-EA-Response.pdf \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](#)

Government has announced its plan to deal with sewage discharges. It's regrettable that under the new regime, water companies have 28 years (until 2050) to eliminate sewage discharges. The Rivers Trust and other groups including WildFish argue that the plans allow or otherwise encourage water companies to continue the unlawful practice of sewage discharges outside of exceptional circumstances, in some cases, until 2050.

[Call for Thames Water to act on sewage concerns - South Oxfordshire District Council \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](#)

Everyone Active Grant

Applications are still open for the new Everyone Active Grant. Individuals and organisations working on projects that help residents get active or maintain activity could get up to £1000 in funding. Eligible organisations are not limited to traditional sports clubs: gardening clubs, green gyms, walking groups etc could all be eligible. Do spread the word and if you are unsure whether your

group is eligible, just ask! The Grants team has created a promotional poster you can download: [Everyone Active Grant Scheme \(Poster\) \(southandvale.gov.uk\)](https://southandvale.gov.uk)

The deadline for applications is Friday 30 September. More information available at: [Grants - South Oxfordshire District Council \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](https://southoxon.gov.uk)

Capital Grants Scheme

Please note the Capital Grants scheme is now open to applicants. Please see the Grants page on the website (above) for more information.

Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

As part of our efforts to ensure our services and support are accessible to all, we are conducting a Diversity and Inclusion Survey.

We're asking residents for their views on how we can make it easier for people with different needs to access our services. We already do what is required of us legally, but we want to go further to help ensure everyone is able to find out information they need in the best possible way.

The survey is open on our website and will run until 11.59pm on 19 September. Posters, Easy Read leaflets, paper copies of the strategy and survey will be available in local libraries, District Community Centre on Great Western Park, The Beacon and Cornerstone from 15 August. Alternative formats and languages are available by contacting haveyoursay@southandvale.gov.uk or calling 01235 422 425.

Broadband Rollout

Residents of Woodcote and surrounding areas may have noticed Gigaclear are rolling out high-speed broadband throughout the village. Gigaclear have already installed broadband locally in places including Kidmore End, Sonning Common and, on the other side of the river, at Streatley.

The County Council maintains close working relationships with commercial operators and is taking a partnership approach to the rollout of commercial broadband.

Some residents have expressed concerns around the erection of unsightly poles for super-fast broadband. In 90% of delivery, existing Openreach ducts are used by all telecoms operators for blowing fibre through. However, there are areas where the legacy Openreach (Post Office) network was built by simply burying telephone lines. This is mostly in rural areas but also in some suburban locations. The cost difference between arranging road closures, digging in new ducts then blowing fibre through them is in the order of four times the cost of standing poles and "flying fibre".

Ofcom has granted Code Powers to Operators to stand new poles without planning consent so the default will always be overhead delivery, typically on a highway verge where there is no requirement even for a wayleave.

If an Operator wants/needs to use private land, they must request permission from the landowner, but ultimately if that permission is 'unreasonably withheld' (i.e. the landowner just doesn't want the pole), then the Operator can use Code powers to trump the landowner anyway.

Feel free to contact Gigaclear if you have any queries – **Email:** networkbuildqueries@gigaclear.com

Phone: 0370 774 0537

And finally... Henley Municipal Charities – Almshouse Available

A one-bedroom almshouse in central Henley has become available. Please spread the word to needy residents in Bix, Rotherfield Greys or Henley (the areas of eligibility): [HMC Almshouse advertisement September 2022.pdf](#)