

District Council Update: Rotherfield Greys PC Lorraine Hillier and Jo Robb

Full Council

The first meeting of Full Council since the Covid crisis will take place this Thursday, 16 July.

The agenda is available online and you can watch the meeting live through the SODC website.

Five motions will be debated on Thursday, the text of these motions is copied at the bottom of this update.

<http://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=122&MId=2637&Ver=4>

Virtual meetings update

The Council is testing its systems to allow Parish Councils, the general public and other groups to take part directly in our online committee meetings.

The meetings are currently working well, and many town and parish councils and members of the public have contributed by providing a written statement.

The Joint Audit and Governance Committee meeting, scheduled for 13 July, will be the first to feature live participation and, provided this is a success, the system will be rolled out to enable Parish Councils and others to participate live in Planning Committee meetings from the next Planning Committee meeting on 22 July.

The Examination in Public of the Local Plan is also due to be streamed live, starting on 14th July.

Highlands Park Lighting

Tom Wyatt of the planning team at SODC has secured the agreement of the developer to install “caps” on top of the lights along Highlands Lane to reduce upward light pollution coming from these streetlamps. I have requested further detail on whether the lights will be on timers at night. Tom is away on leave so I will update you when I have further information.

For Lease Sign at Greys Business Centre

Jo has contacted Hicks and Baker about this sign. Enforcement have confirmed that the sign complies with guidance in terms of size so is allowed under permitted development. However, Hicks and Baker have indicated that a lease is in the process of being negotiated so the signs may be coming down soon anyway. I will follow up next week and update you.

Changes to restrictions on shielded residents

As you'll be aware, the government is planning to lift restrictions on shielded residents at the end of this month. This means that residents who had previously been advised to stay at home during lockdown for their own safety will be able to visit shops again to get their groceries and other necessary supplies. They will still need to follow the latest government advice on social distancing measures, but it will allow them to be much more independent.

It also means that the government's food parcels programme will be coming to an end – something that will affect around 700 of our residents.

Here at South and Vale we will be making some adjustments to our food distribution service, which we set up to complement the national scheme to support any resident that needed help and not just those that were shielding. As well as urgent food parcels, we have been providing weekly top up provision to the national food boxes to 35 or so households, and we will be contacting them shortly to let them know what ongoing support is available if, for whatever reason they feel uncomfortable or unable to go to the shops for their essential supplies. This could be for financial as well as health related reasons, so we will be offering our support in connecting them with the relevant group or organisation that is best placed to help on an ongoing basis. We will make sure every single one of these residents has the right support in place, even if that means continuing with the service that we have been providing them for a while longer.

The adjustments we are making to our food distribution service, will enable us to focus on urgent need as we come out of the shielding period and also respond to localised lockdowns across Oxfordshire. We will also ensure that we can respond and increase our service provision should a second wave and national lockdown occur.

We are also getting in touch with our incredible volunteer groups to explain that whilst we may be easing out of lockdown their valuable services may still be very much needed as there will be some residents that despite this new freedom may still feel uncomfortable leaving their homes.

All this work is going on while we're updating and restructuring the community hub team to meet our changing roles and responsibilities, so our monthly report has been a little delayed. We are, however, aiming to have it ready for next Friday's update.

Pools, gyms and leisure centres

You will probably have seen the government announcement yesterday that outdoor pools can re-open from tomorrow, and leisure centres and indoor swimming pools can re-open from the 25 July.

Our leisure team have been working with our leisure provider GLL during lockdown on plans for re-opening our leisure facilities across the districts.

We are planning to do this in a phased manner, with each centre operating differently depending on the facilities they have. It will take a little time to assess all the centres in line with the guidance to make sure that when they are ready to open, they are safe for both staff and customers. However, there's quite a bit of work needed to make this all happen by 25 July. We will let you know more once we've had the chance to work through the government guidance.

Following ongoing discussions with GLL, unfortunately we will not be opening the outdoor splash pools and swimming pools in Abingdon and Wallingford this year.

Given the time that it takes to prepare the pools for a normal season and the social distancing measures that would be required it is sadly not viable to open these facilities this year. We know that both sites are very popular with residents and

visitors so this was not an easy decision to take but one where all parties felt there really were no other options.

A well done and thank you to the Parks team

As you'll be aware from previous updates, our Parks team has been working very hard this week to make sure all our play areas and outdoor fitness equipment are safe and secure to reopen after months of being closed – that's more than 30 locations in our districts.

Our message to the public is:

All the details of our play areas are [here](#). If you plan to visit, please make sure you follow the stay safe guidelines:

- wash or sanitise hands before entering the play area and then again after you leave
- if the play area is busy – come back at a quieter time
- follow social distancing
- only one adult per child is allowed in the play area at a time

Crowmarsh Neighbourhood Plan

The Crowmarsh Neighbourhood Plan is currently undergoing its pre-submission consultation, which closes on 21 August. The documents are available to view on the website [here](#).

Please contact the [Planning Policy team](#) if you'd like to provide any comments by noon 31 July.

Sad news

We've been informed that two South Oxfordshire ex-councillors Betty Atkins and Colin Daukes have recently died. Betty Atkins was Vice-Chair for the district council in 1996/97 and Colin Daukes was South Chair during 2009/10. Colin also served as a Didcot Town Councillor from 2003-2011 and served as Mayor in 2005/6. Our thoughts and condolences are with their families at this time.

New Thames Champion for South Oxfordshire

Cllr Jo Robb, ward councillor for Woodcote and Rotherfield, is taking on the newly created role of Thames Champion. The River Thames is one of our most precious natural assets and Cllr Robb will be networking with river users, councillors and neighbouring councils to improve access to the river, and to protect and enhance its biodiversity and cleanliness.

Jo is proposing a motion to council on 16 July asking officers to begin the process of applying for Bathing Quality Water status for the Thames.

Motions to Full Council, 16 July 2020

To consider motions from councillors in accordance with Council procedure rule 38.

A. Motion to be proposed by Councillor David Bartholomew, seconded by Councillor Jane Murphy

Currently, two individual councillors not members of a recognised party can declare themselves to be a Political Group, with one being the Leader and the other Deputy Leader. This confers a number of advantages on these councillors, including the right to attend Political Group Leader meetings and receive Political Group Leader

briefings. These councillors are thus put in a position of advantage over other councillors without a genuine mandate from a real political group.

This Council asks that the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State requesting that the relevant legislation is amended to state that a Political Group should constitute a minimum of three councillors unless the two councillors are part of a nationally recognised party such as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat or Green.

B. Motion to be proposed by Councillor Jane Murphy, seconded by Councillor Ian White

Council notes that since early March the Covid-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on our communities. Loved ones have lost their lives and many have been seriously ill; some are still fighting the virus as patients or as clinical staff.

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Council recognises the huge effort of our officers during the period. Adjusting to working remotely, volunteering to go beyond the day job to help support shielded people and those isolating, and working long hours to keep vital council services running. Council also recognises that the Towns and Parishes and the community groups and their members and members of the public responded enthusiastically and rapidly to the challenges that we all faced and continue to face.

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Council thanks our residents for their commitment and support. This includes the members of our councils and their staff, the First Responders, the organisers and members of the Good Neighbours' Schemes and Street Volunteers and similar organisations, the people who volunteer or knit or sew and give their time and also those who 'do nothing!' We know that they do nothing because they tell us; how often, when thanked, have you heard people say 'oh, it was nothing!' And we must not forget those who, just by being there, to listen, or step in in an emergency, help to reduce the stress and worry.

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Council thanks everyone for the heroic part they have played, and will continue to play, helping residents in need of support through this dangerous and uncertain time.??

C. Motion to be proposed by Councillor Jane Murphy, seconded by Councillor Ian Snowdon

Council recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown both the national and local economy into a state of turmoil and crisis. The impact on our local businesses and our local communities will only grow in the coming months and requires an immediate response.

This Council will urgently set up a new committee called the Local Economy Resilience Advisory Committee, to guide this council's response to this crisis. Following the model of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee, this new committee will be advisory to the Cabinet and should be made up of 12 members in total based on political balance (the head of legal and democratic to make appointments to the committee seats and substitute positions in accordance with the wishes of the relevant group leader). The term of reference for the new committee should be drawn up by the Acting Deputy Chief Executive – Place, in consultation with the Cabinet member for development and regeneration and group leaders. It will operate alongside and have equal weight to the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee, to ensure this council works cross party and does everything it can to help local business, the high streets of our market towns and villages, and our communities survive this economic shock.

D. Motion to be proposed by Councillor Ian White, seconded by Councillor Jane Murphy

Changes to the Council's Constitution have been made by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) under Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, as documented in the CEO's Decision Notice of the 18 May 2020.

These include the removal of the automatic referral of planning applications to the Planning Committee where Parish or Town Councils views are at odds with officer recommendations. This is an unnecessary removal of transparency, an affront to the natural democratic process, is disproportionate and inappropriate.

Additionally, a requirement has been introduced that where a Ward Councillor refers an application to the Planning Committee it has to be subject to the agreement of two other Councillors, being the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee. This effectively creates a 'right of Veto' over a fellow Councillor, thus establishing an arbitrary two-tier system of Councillors where one Councillor effectively holds power over another, with no mechanism for appeal. Again, this is undemocratic and inappropriate.

For these reasons, this Council instructs that the changes referred to should be rescinded immediately, thereby restoring democratic control.

E. Motion to be proposed by Councillor Jane Murphy, seconded Caroline Newton

This Council recognises the excellent work of all local government staff across Oxfordshire during the COVID-19 crisis. Councils have worked together in difficult times, showing that organisational barriers to joint working can be overcome.

All Councils have gone the extra mile in delivering services to our residents that prioritise the most vulnerable.

This has inevitably incurred additional costs – c. £90 million across all tiers. All Councils acknowledge the additional Government funding to date, but we have a duty to respond to the national financial challenge ahead and to be open with residents.

All Councils across Oxfordshire are now considering how they can balance budgets and protect frontline services. No Councillor nor party wants to see drastic cuts to vital Council services. We, as a group of democratically elected leaders, should take the opportunity provided by the devolution white paper to ensure that we provide the best possible public services for our residents.

Further to the motion passed at the December 2019 Council meeting, and reflecting that much has changed since, that Council calls on the Leader to write to the Secretary of State requesting that we re-open and actively pursue consideration of a Unitary Authority for Oxfordshire and re-start a wide-ranging conversation with our local authority partners, residents and stakeholders to explore all options for a new future for Oxfordshire. Our aims are clear: safeguard public services in the future, support a vibrant local democracy and ensure a strong economy.

F. Motion proposed by Councillor Jo Robb, seconded by Councillor Andrea Powell.

Council notes the growing popularity of wild swimming, paddling, kayaking and paddle boarding in the River Thames and its tributaries and, more importantly, the intrinsic value of clean water and healthy, biodiverse rivers.

The UK's water companies are permitted to release raw sewage into waterways in specific circumstances, under licence from the Environment Agency. Regulators rely on self-reporting on the part of the water companies and there is no way for river users to know in real time when these Controlled Sewage Overflows (CSOs) happen.

Hundreds of beaches around the UK have Bathing Quality Water status – this ensures the Environment Agency monitors and reports on water quality throughout the bathing season.

Only a handful of inland lakes in the UK – *and no rivers* – have Bathing Quality Water status.

Recognising the intrinsic importance of the River Thames as a natural asset of national significance and its value to our communities, this Council:

1. Asks officers to work with appropriate partners such as the Environment Agency, The Rivers Trust and Surfers Against Sewage to begin the process of applying for Bathing Quality Water status for the River Thames in South Oxfordshire;
2. Calls on Thames Water to draft and implement an action plan for the elimination of Controlled Sewage Overflows (CSOs) across its sewage treatment network;

3. Calls on Thames Water to provide accurate, real-time and publicly available information about Controlled Sewage Overflows into the Thames and its tributaries;
4. Asks the Leader of the Council to write to the leaders of neighbouring Councils along the river inviting them to appoint Thames Champions to work together to enhance the safety, cleanliness and biodiversity of the river and make the River Thames "Safe for All."