

## **SODC A Conservative District Councillor's View** **(Or What The Council Is Doing)**

**October 2020.**

### **Post in the Ward**

Following on from our report a couple of months ago, although there was a short improvement in the postal service, we continue to get reports of delays in delivery with some being over a week for first class post. Lynn has therefore reopened her dialogue with a senior Royal Mail Manager and continues to seek an improvement in the service in our Ward. The initial reason given for postal delays was that staff had been severely impacted by Covid-19, but the latest information provided is that, in the coming months the area will have full coverage in place, due to reduced absence levels, in the sorting office in Thame. Interestingly, we have now heard that Didcot is experiencing similar issues.

### **Planning**

#### **Local Plan 2034**

The situation on LP2034 is that it continues to progress through the examination stage and following on from the Inspector's Initial Findings Report and suggestions, these are now in the Consultation Stage which runs until the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020. More information about this can be found here:

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/emerging-local-plan>

For us, given that the Secretary of State has directed that we as a Council must adopt the Plan by the end of this year as the Administration was unable to provide him with any viable alternative, this means that we have as much control of development in the Ward as we might expect at this stage and that our Neighbourhood Plans have as much weight as might be afforded them at their various stages.

#### **Planning Decisions**

From our previous reports you will be aware that under the Covid-19 Emergency Powers, the Administration had suspended the Automatic referral of Planning Applications to Planning Committee if Parish Councils disagreed with the Planning Officer differed. This was subject to review after 6 months and at Full Council later this week, the Administration has put forward its proposal to make this a permanent change to the Council's Constitution notwithstanding the numerous submissions made by Parish Councils. Given their majority, we think it unlikely that this measure will be voted down.

### **Latest update on Car Park Fees**

As reported last month, the Cabinet has been looking at carpark fees for the SODC owned carparks, as these have not been reviewed for some years.

Full details of the Cabinet discussion can be found at:

<http://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=10361>

One of the provisions is for the introduction of charges for the carpark in Chinnor High Street, although quite how these will be implemented and enforced remains to be seen. As Chair of Scrutiny, Ian had asked for a report to be brought forward to the Scrutiny Committee for review at a future meeting and this is now expected to be for the November meeting. .

### **Cllr Covid-19 grants**

With Covid-19 infection rates continuing to rise and the possibility of a further lockdown looking increasingly likely, the emergency councillor grants that we have been able to make will continue for a while longer although our pot is getting smaller.

At the outset we decided that we would effectively pool our two Grant pots as this would give us much greater flexibility. To date we have been able to support a number of areas, which include a grant to the Oxfordshire Association for the Blind (£500) to help them with their work with residents in our Ward, the Sharing Life Trust (£2,500), based in Thame, who provide support with a food bank and who can also help out with vouchers for bills like electricity and gas, and a small grant to Towersey Parish Council to help with additional waste due to the dramatic up-turn in walkers during lock-down.

If you are aware of any areas that might need our help from this scheme please do let us know so we can see if they meet the criteria we have to work to.

### **Advice for businesses on new regulations**

Our licensing and food safety teams are working together along with their counterparts at other local authorities to help local businesses get up to speed with the new regulations brought in recently to help curb the pandemic.

#### **FOOD AND DRINK BUSINESSES**

We're helping businesses understand their responsibilities around the new "rule of six" regulations, including:

- food and drink businesses cannot take bookings for a table of more than six people (there are exceptions to this for example where the group is all from one household)
- they must not allow groups of more than six into their premises, except where one of the exceptions applies
- they must not allow people to mingle between groups where this would make a group larger than six.

Restaurants, cafes, pubs, bars, social clubs and other similar businesses must now be closed (i.e. no customers on the premises) between 10pm and 5am. There are also new rules on gathering data as part of Test and Trace and we're encouraging all businesses to use and promote the NHS Test and Trace app.

There are more details including information on the exceptions to the rules on the councils' licensing page on our website

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/business/licensing/covid-19-licensing-advice-alcohol-entertainment-gambling-and-events>

## **TAXIS**

We're advising all taxi drivers that they should wear face coverings and regulations now state that passengers **must** wear face coverings. Taxi drivers should remind customers of this at the time of booking. If a passenger is not wearing a face covering, then drivers can refuse to carry them, taking into account any mitigating circumstances such as any medical condition which may prevent the person from wearing a face covering. Here are some [examples of reasons why some people cannot wear face coverings](#).

More information on Covid-19 rules for taxis and private hire vehicles is on our website pages here

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/business/licensing/taxi-licences/covid-19-licensing-advice-taxi-and-private-hire>

## **Waste Recycling**

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils launched a recycling quiz this summer and residents rushed to take part with more than 1,800 answering so far.

The question with the most incorrect answers was "Should you put crisp tubes in the recycling bin?" – 42 per cent said yes, and 58 per cent gave the right answer which is no\*.

The question is in the councils' [Great Green Bin Recycling Quiz](#) which tests recycling knowledge and aims to reduce recycling contamination in the districts - when the wrong things are put in the green bins, whole truckloads of residents' recycling is reduced to landfill rubbish.

The question most people have got right is about nappies. A whopping 99.7 per cent of people agree that you cannot put nappies into a recycling bin. Residents are also very clear about the fact they can put tins and tin foil into recycling - 98.5 per cent of answers are correct. However, nearly a third of respondents wrongly think broken glassware such as measuring jugs, light bulbs or drinking glasses can be put in the recycling bin.

Four short films have been made by the councils' waste team to help people with recycling and they are available here:

Together we recycle – Help at home <https://youtu.be/m8P-RmQcRBQ>

Together we recycle – Help the bin crews [https://youtu.be/uctxUw3\\_q3Y](https://youtu.be/uctxUw3_q3Y)

Together we recycle – Call centre help - [https://youtu.be/CYKa0fM5\\_ow](https://youtu.be/CYKa0fM5_ow)

Together we recycle – Help behind the scenes - <https://youtu.be/k2Bk8Xc52PQ>

### **Help for residents struggling financially from Covid-19**

The government has given us some emergency assistance funding to support any of our residents who are struggling financially as a result of the pandemic.

We are working closely with local information and advice centres to help us identify residents who might be in this situation and to help provide support.

If you become aware of anyone in this situation, please signpost them to one of the following:

- Citizens Advice – 0300 3309042
- Wantage Independent Advice Centre – 01235 765348

It's important we manage their expectations as there are strict criteria that residents must meet to receive support, and it's important they're aware that any support they receive is emergency support while we work with them along with other relevant agencies to put in place an ongoing package of help.

It is also worth noting that these are limited funds, which we're expected to spend by 31 October 2020 at the latest.

### **Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy 2020-2025**

Some of you will already be aware of the strategy we're developing with our county council colleagues to support and encourage electric vehicle (EV) ownership in Oxfordshire. For those of you that aren't here's a brief overview.

The strategy will include:

- minimum standards shared across Oxfordshire for EV charging infrastructure and customer experience.
- A common approach to managing EV charging in local authority car parks.
- Agreed targets for the provision of EV charging across Oxfordshire.
- A common framework of options for residents without off-street parking.

Our next milestone in the development of the strategy will be for the draft EV infrastructure strategy to be presented to CEAC in December.

## **Corporate Strategy Themes**

In July of this year Cabinet members at South Oxfordshire District Council asked residents and those working in the district to have their say on what mattered to them about where they live to help form the themes of the forthcoming Corporate Plan.

The survey had a great response with more than 930 people giving their feedback on the six themes they were asked to comment on. These themes included “Action on the Climate Emergency”, “Homes and infrastructure that meets local needs” and “Openness and Accountability”.

After the survey closed councillors discussed the feedback and a number of changes have been recommended based on the information given by those living and working in South Oxfordshire.

Some of the changes that have been recommended are:

- To reorder the themes to give greater emphasis to the ones ranked most important, particularly “Protect and Restore our Natural World” and improving “Openness and Accountability”
- Consider the concerns about housing and over development and consider the acceleration of a project to deliver Council-owned net-zero homes and use grants, planning policy and advocacy to ensure the same standards throughout the district to mitigate concerns.
- Changes to be made to some of the language used in the Corporate Plan report replacing the words with those felt more understandable and in Plain English

Cllr Sue Cooper, Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council said: “We said that we would listen to what residents and those working in South Oxfordshire had to say, and we have. It really matters to us that these themes resonate with the people we are here to serve, and they know that having taken the time to respond to us, we would act upon their feedback where we felt it was right to do so.”

Cllr Andrea Powell, Cabinet member for Corporate Services at South Oxfordshire District Council said “These themes are really important for us as councillors to form our priorities for the coming years and to form the way we as a council work. By incorporating the feedback we have been given into our Corporate Plan we know that we are doing what we can to make the district a better place for businesses, for families and for future generations”

**There is much more we could write but five pages is already too much!**

**Lynn Lloyd and Ian White**

**South Oxfordshire District Councillors for the Chinnor Ward.**