

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

June2020.

Ward Specific

Grants

As mentioned previously, at the beginning of the crisis, a decision was made to change the rules of the scheme to make available £2000 of the Grant Pot to each councillor to enable us to help in emergencies where a small amount of money was needed and we have combined our funding and have £4,000.

We are aware that a significant number of our residents have had to make use of the Food Bank in Thame and we have donated £1,000 to the Sharing Life Trust who run this, to help towards the increased demand. We have also been approached by Towersey PC for help with a new rubbish bin. The village has been inundated with additional walkers due to the constraints of the Lock-down, which has resulted in a massive increase in waste. Whilst members of the Council are emptying the bins on a daily basis, they need several extra bins, and we have been pleased to provide funding for one of these.

Council funds are public money, so we regard this as a donation on behalf of all of the residents of our Ward comprising Chinnor, Aston Rowant, Henton, Sydenham, Kingston Blount, Towersey and the smaller communities.

Business Support

We have received a number of requests for assistance where local businesses have had issues with their applications for the Government funded support grants and loans, where there have been significant delays. We and our officers have been able to quickly bring these to a successful resolution.

The Old Kiln Lakes Quarries

The issues here are well documented, and whilst responsibility for the quarries lies with Taylor Wimpey, and issues on the roads jointly with them, the County and the Police, Lynn has been working with the District Officers to ensure that as far as possible we do everything, we can to support our community and escalate the issue to the highest level.

Planning

Neighbourhood Plan updates

We remain assured that, provided the Plan or up-date are ready to go to referendum, and the confirmatory letter issued, then the new Plan or Amendments will have full weight. This is particularly important in view of the Wheatley Brooks University Appeal decision.

Planning Committee

After a rehearsal we have now resumed Planning Committees with the first being held on the 28th May using Microsoft Teams. This is a relatively new technology and as it needs to be secure and meet a number of legal protocols our usage is still developing. For the time being, we are having to restrict public statements and Parish Council representations to written submissions before the meeting. On the basis of our first meeting, this has worked well.

If you would like to see how it worked, then the meeting has been recorded and is available for you to watch at: <https://youtu.be/LMa7H8Lyr7c>

Please remember that it was our first live broadcast, so it is a bit rough around the edges, but practice will bring improvement. For this first meeting, we restricted ourselves to two cases, but we expect this to increase as we get used to this approach. I do hope that this will become the norm going forward in view of the cost savings in terms of travel and room hire.

Harringtons

No further information, but we continue to monitor the position given the concerns expressed by the few residents who have raised this as a potential issue.

Local Plan 2034

LP2034 continues to progress through the examination stage and the Inspectors first set of questions have been answered. Virtual Hearing Sessions will commence at 10.00am on Tuesday 14th July and will be conducted via Microsoft Teams. An outline programme for the hearings, his “matters and questions” document, and some guidance about the process. He has allocated 16 days across 4 weeks. Full details and how to watch and/or participate are on our web site at:

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-plan-2034/local-plan-2034-examinatio>

SODC Finances

Council tax reminders

In mid-June we are planning to begin sending reminders to residents who have overdue unpaid council tax payments, excluding residents who receive Council Tax Reduction benefit. One of the purposes of these reminders is to help identify people who are struggling to pay so we can explain to them that they have options available to them. We will be including a special insert into the council tax reminder letters to explain this.

It will let them know that the letter is simply a reminder and to let them know that if they're struggling to pay for any reason, including because they've lost

work or income because of the COVID-19 pandemic, then the best course of action is to get in touch with us as soon as possible. By getting in touch with us, we'll be able to provide them with advice, make changes to their payment plan, and let them know what support is available – it's likely that many will be eligible for a council tax reduction, especially if they have recently been awarded Universal Credit.

It's worth bearing in mind that while we're here to help and support those who are unable to pay, it doesn't mean we will stop identifying and chasing those who are able to pay but choose not to. This is another reason it's important that people who are unable to pay let us know as soon as possible.

CoVID-19 Matters

Test and Trace

We have a part to play in the government's new Test and Trace system that was launched this week and being rolled out across the country. The county council, as Oxfordshire's Public Health Authority, will lead this work locally and we will work alongside them to provide appropriate resources and support as required. Oxfordshire is not in the first wave of areas to roll this out so the details have not yet been fully worked through and will need to flex to learn from others' experiences. We are however in conversations with all of the relevant health organisations and councils in Oxfordshire to plan it all out.

We'll let you know when we have more information on how we'll be involved in this important part of the UK's response to the pandemic.

Business Support

We have received a relatively small, but important, number of requests for assistance where local businesses have had issues with their applications for the Government funded support grants and loans, where there have been significant delays. We have been able to quickly bring these to a successful resolution.

Discretionary Business Grants

The new discretionary grants scheme for small businesses is very nearly ready to go live. We were hoping to launch it this coming Monday 1 June but want to build in a few days for testing to take place, to ensure a smooth process from the outset. To give businesses a head start, we'll be sharing the details of the criteria and the information they'll need to provide on Monday (1 June), so they're ready to apply as soon as the system goes live. We're now expecting to launch the scheme at noon on Wednesday 3 June.

Parking charges to be re-introduced

From Monday 8 June we will re-introduce parking charges in our car parks. This follows the government's announcement that outdoor markets and car showrooms are to re-open on 1 June and non-essential retail on 15 June.

This move will help to improve the availability of parking spaces as people start to visit local shops again and encourage them to consider using more sustainable travel methods when visiting our town centres.

Car parks will operate as normal, so users must display a ticket, including the free charging periods. Normal rates will apply. We will also start issuing new permits and re-issuing permits to anyone who's permit would've expired during the lockdown.

NHS staff and care workers who display a national COVID-19 parking pass can continue to park for free - to claim a pass, they need to email carparks.southandvale.uk@sabagroup.com, with proof of their employment

We will be letting people know about the return to charging through the usual channels, as well as notices in our car parks. For the first week there will also be car park inspectors on hand to advise people of the need to pay again.

There will be a week's grace between 8-14 June, to allow time for this message to reach everyone that has been regularly benefitting from the free service. During this time, we will not be issuing parking tickets but instead, placing warning notices on cars that aren't displaying a valid ticket to advise them that charges are now in place. We will begin full enforcement from 15 June.

Bereavement

Attached is the flyer about bereavement services in Oxfordshire, which may be of help to anyone who has lost a loved one or friend.

Grants

Before the CoVID-19 crisis started, Council agreed to maintain the Councillor's Grant at £5,000 following recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee that the Administration should not reduce this to £2,500.

As mentioned previously, at the beginning of the crisis, a decision was made to change to rules of the scheme to make available £2000 of the Grant Pot to each councillor to enable us to help in emergencies where a small amount of money was needed.

To date, we as a group, have made a significant number of grants available across our District, and given the diversity of our communities, these have covered a wide range of needs. Examples of these are contributions to food banks, funding support for food parcels made up in our parishes and newsletters, small local charities supporting groups like the blind, hi-vis vests for volunteers, support for community day centres . . . and many others!

Council funds are public money, so we regard this as a donation on behalf of all of the residents of our Wards.

Waste and Recycling - Reminder

As previously advised, at the start of the CoVID-19 crisis we had very real concerns about the collection of waste and due to the virus' potential impact on the Biffa crews, to what extent collections would continue.

There has been some disruption with the crews on the main collection vehicles being reduced from three to two due to the need for some isolation but they have continued to do splendidly, especially in the very hot weather we have enjoyed. Giving them a wave, a thumbs-up or a smile tells them that they are appreciated; you can tell from the smiles on their faces!

Bulky item collections have resumed and the County have reopened the recycling centres but with amended procedures due to the need for CoVID-19 isolation.

Bulky Waste collection information is here:

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/your-recycling-and-waste-collections/bulky-household>

Information regarding the OCC Recycling Centre is here:

https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/environment-and-planning/waste-and-recycling/household-waste/household-waste-recycling-centres?utm_term=nil&utm_content=

Active Travel Funding

Since the announcement by Grant Shapps of the funding for active travel there has been a lot of speculation and raised expectations.

The provision of transport facilities falls within the County Council remit but it is of interest to all of us and we are supporting Ian Hudspeth's proposals as far as we are able.

Ian is keen the funds are used across the county to promote active travel and not just restricted to Oxford City where there has been a great deal of focus. In itself £2.9 million proposed is a lot of money but when it's spread across the county it won't go far. There is longer term funding of £2 billion which was already announced as part of a longer term £5 billion back in February. So, lots of re-announcements with lots of funds that raise expectations.

The County highways team have been working on various ideas along with our officers but without knowing the level of funding it's difficult to put forward schemes at the without raising expectations.

Ian's cycling champion, Suzanne Bartington organised a survey which will give the highways team more of an understanding of what would be welcomed across the county in different divisions. We are working with our County colleagues to put forward ideas to improve active travel in our wards, either temporary or permanent. If you have any suggestions, then do let us know so we can put them forward.

A brief caution though; County are doing a lot of work but until we know what the funding is, we need to keep expectations levels down!

Free webinar for businesses in South and Vale

We have partnered with Graham Ballantyne, Director of the UK Business Mentoring Group, to deliver a free webinar on Thursday to help local businesses with their recovery plans.

The webinar will include lots of tips and pointers, along with useful templates, and complementary mentoring sessions.

You can find out more information on the South and Vale Business Support web site:

<https://www.svbs.co.uk/recovery-webinar/>

We've also heard that the next Pop-Up business school for Oxfordshire is taking place online in June. There's more information here:
<https://events.popupbusinessschool.co.uk/OxfordJune2020#/?lang=en>

Thames Water's plan approved

The government has approved the Thames Water plan that sets out how it intends to ensure the region has sufficient water supply over the next 80 years. The plan includes the controversial proposals for a reservoir in the Vale.

You can view the plan on Thames Water's web site at:

<https://corporate.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/our-strategies-and-plans/water-resources>

It is important to note that this is not the final decision on the reservoir, and they continue to consider other options as well. The document explains that they'll need to make a decision on the reservoir in 2022/23.

The reservoir will also have to go through the planning process for "nationally significant infrastructure projects", which is led by the Planning Inspectorate. You can read more about this process here:

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/application-process/the-process/>

Stay vigilant – beware of scams and potential cyber-attacks

We've been made aware that criminals have been targeting local authority staff and councillors by sending scam emails and attempting cyber-attacks while people are remote working. This also applies to all of those members of our communities.

Attempted cyber-attacks

Some fraudsters are replicating MS Teams, Skype and Zoom to ask people to login with their Office365 credentials. If you click the link, it redirects you to a fake Microsoft log-in page for you to enter your details.

Please don't enter your details if this happens to you - if you've already logged into Office365 then you shouldn't need to log in again.

Phishing, vishing and smishing emails – just think fishing!

These emails, social media messages, phone calls or texts, or fake websites are on the increase and working remotely, still means you can be targeted by scammers. You can help us to fight against online fraud by staying alert.

Top tips to help you:

- Don't assume someone is who they say they are
- Never click on links in emails unless you know the sender is trustworthy
- Never give personal information

Here's somethings to look out for:

- bad spelling/grammar or graphics in emails
- warnings such as 'urgent message', 'there's a secure message waiting for you' or 'if you don't respond...'
- suspicious web addresses
- unusual sender/caller addresses

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

Lynn Lloyd and Ian White

South Oxfordshire District Councillors for the Chinnor Ward.