

SODC Monthly Briefing - September 2022

Cllr Caroline Newton, Haseley Brook Ward

SODC expressed its condolences to the Royal Family on the sad loss of Queen Elizabeth II. Books of Condolence were hosted at the SODC office in Milton Park and the flag was flown at half mast.

SODC is moving

From 3 October, SODC will be based at Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abington OX14 3JE.

Thereafter, Full Council meetings will be held at Didcot Civic Hall. All other council and committee meetings will take place at Abbey House until further notice.

Work continues on the masterplan for the new office accommodation in Didcot.

Bin Collections

Biffa is introducing new waste collection routes across the district from 10 October. About 20% of residents will be affected, and Biffa will be writing to them to let them know in what way the change will impact them:

A different bin collection day

A week change - where rubbish and recycling will swap but the actual bin days remains the same

A new bin day AND a week change.

This change is necessary because since the current collection routes were first planned a decade ago lots of new homes have been built across the district. This means collection routes have become much busier in some areas - and the new routes will make them more efficient.

Strategic Planning

In August, SODC and the other four local planning authorities in Oxfordshire (Vale of the White Horse District Council, West Oxon DC, Cherwell DC and the City of Oxford) announced they would cease working together on the strategic joint spatial plan for Oxfordshire to 2050, known as the Oxfordshire Plan. The Oxfordshire Plan had been intended to focus on strategic issues relating to the development of the county, including identifying future housing need and setting future house-building requirements for the districts and City.

This decision puts at risks £10 millions of Government funding for infrastructure agreed in 2017/18 to support the delivery of houses in the county, including in South Oxfordshire. The councils are in discussion with Govt officials.

Preparatory work continues on the strategic sites allocated in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

Infrastructure Funding

House builders are required to pay a levy on all new homes to contribute to the provision of infrastructure (roads, schools etc) in the area. SODC collects the funds and they are then allocated to local public sector bodies according to an agreed formula. In the four months to July 2022, the total Community Infrastructure Levy collected in South Oxfordshire was £2,722,000. SODC currently holds £7 million. The process to allocate CIL funding for SODC projects began in August and will feed into the 2023/24 budget setting process.

Water Resources Southeast

WRSE is continuing its work to ensure security of water supply over the next 50-100 years. A public consultation has recently been held on their draft regional plan, and SODC submitted a response opposing to the proposal to build a large reservoir southwest of Abingdon.

In light of the increasingly extreme weather events - including this year's drought - I will be pressing the council to explain what measures it proposes to help this region adapt to climate change.

Housing

The Housing team has been tackling increasing demand for housing services arising from cost-of-living challenges and the Ukrainian refugee situation. 39 families received case officer support in

August to prevent or end homelessness, and the number of households in emergency accommodation as of 31 August was 13 - an increase from July.

The team continues to support Ukrainian refugee households into host accommodation in South Oxfordshire, and is working closely with colleagues in OCC and other district councils to rematch Ukrainian families where the relationship with the host has broken down. The team has resettled 5 Afghan families in the district and are giving them intensive support. SODC is recruiting to 4 new positions to provide housing support for Ukrainian households. The posts will be funded by the central Govt Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

The number of rough sleepers has risen in the district. On 31 August 5 rough sleepers were recorded in South Oxon, which reflects the increasing workload pressures on the housing team to identify households at risk of homelessness and prevent rough sleeping.

The number of households in housing need on SODC's housing register at the end of August was 1182.

The target for the number of affordable homes to be delivered in South Oxon in 2022/23 is 235. The number completed in Q1 was 85.

Grant Funding

Bidding is open for the SODC Capital Grant Scheme. The total budget for the scheme is £320,000, and voluntary and community organisations can apply for up to £75,000 of capital funding for projects that help improve people's quality of life. Projects can receive a minimum of £1000 and up to 50% of their total costs.

Voter Registration

Households are being urged to respond ASAP if they receive a reminder to update their voter registration details. Over the summer, SODC sent a 'Canvass Communication Form' to all homes asking occupants to check their voter registration details. Households whose occupants over the age of 16 are believed to have changed since the last election should have received a yellow letter requiring them to confirm or update their details online.

By law, councils must ensure the electoral register is up to date, so may visit households that fail to respond to the reminder.

The next scheduled elections are for SODC in May 2023.

Licensing

Pavement licences were introduced in 2020 to support hospitality businesses during the pandemic. This temporary provision has now been extended until 30 Sept 2023 to allow businesses selling food and drinks to place tables and chairs on the pavement outside their premises. The maximum application fee remains at £100.

Community Safety

SODC has received funding from OCC for a domestic abuse co-ordinator to help meet its duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The post is currently being advertised.

The council, through its safeguarding work, is supporting people arriving in our district from Ukraine.

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