

# District Councillor Report Haseley Brook ward

August 2023

Cllr Georgina Heritage



## **Foreword**

There has been a lot going on throughout the summer, some of which resulting in misunderstanding and misinformation on social media. Amongst other district news, I'm taking the opportunity to address these matters and, for those parishes that utilise this report for parish magazines, I'm hoping some of the following information may offer clarification for residents:

## **Oak Taverns / Street Food Licensing**

Despite claims to the contrary from Oak Taverns and on social media throughout August, SODC did not at any stage ban food trucks from pubs. There was a huge amount of misinformation and gossip circulating, despite a statement from SODC on the matter. In short, the issue with Oak Taverns arose because the company did not seek advice from SODC on the appropriate street trading requirements prior to operating with mobile catering facilities. The situation came to light following various complaints to SODC, after which SODC explained to Oak Taverns that relevant permissions needed to be obtained or they would have to cease this type of food offering. At no point did SODC issue a ban, and the council was indeed keen to work through the matter with the pub company in a way that would not disrupt trading. Instead, it appears that Oak Taverns chose to make an unexpected and misleading public announcement on a Friday afternoon (when SODC was unable to respond) that their food vans could no longer operate, and gave the impression that SODC had told them to stop trading immediately.

Following their own public statement on the matter, SODC went on to issue this response:

***"You may have seen posts on social media claiming that South Oxfordshire District Council had banned street food trucks from operating at sites owned by Oak Taverns. This is NOT true; we have not banned street trading at their sites.***

***Oak Taverns have not ensured that the permits required for street trading to take place legally at their sites in South Oxfordshire are in place. We have been in contact with them about this situation for a number of weeks with the aim of resolving this issue as quickly as possible. This issue concerns national legal requirements; we have provided them with guidance about this but at no point have we said that street trading was banned from taking place.***

***We were therefore disappointed that Oak Taverns chose to post inaccurate information about this situation on social media and the resulting comments that we received from members of the public.***

*Street trading consent is important as it helps to ensure public safety and that the venue is meeting its insurance requirements, as well as preventing nuisance or annoyance (for example from noise, litter and parking) to those in the area.*

*Street trading makes a valuable contribution our local culture and economy. The services that street traders provide for residents and visitors are hugely important and we are doing all we can to support them and to ensure there are no unnecessary burdens placed on them to operate safely and successfully.*

*We will continue to work with Oak Taverns with the aim of ensuring street trading can take place legally at their sites as soon as possible.*

*By law, all locations where street trading takes place, including on private land, require a specific consent to allow this to happen if members of the public can access the site without paying an entry fee. This is a national requirement which applies to all venues across the country. Individual mobile traders are also required to hold street trading consent for all the sites they will operate from.”*

## **New SODC Office Building**

South Oxfordshire District Council has submitted a planning application for the building, and the plans are available to view online. There have been many questions about the proposed development over various Facebook pages and in local news sources, so I thought it might be helpful to address some of these:

### ***Why a new office?***

The old office burnt down in 2015. The then Administration moved the council into very expensive rented offices on Milton Park. The new Administration activated the break clause in the lease, moved into temporary accommodation in Abingdon, and started to look for a new permanent home.

### ***Why not stay in Abbey House?***

It is an old building which would need a fortune spent on renovation if we were to stay there permanently. It also doesn't have a big enough space for council meetings, and the transport links from the rest of the district aren't good. It's also possible that the Vale, which owns it, may have alternative uses for it in the long term.

### ***Why Didcot?***

Didcot lies at the centre of the two districts, and this site is opposite a rail, bus and cycle transport hub. The site is owned by SODC and is clearly visible from the train station, and accessible. There will be a small car park for visitors and those with disabilities but (in a rare act of forward planning) the government funded a multi-storey car park at the station with 385 spaces, which is currently under used because of the car parks currently on the Gateway site.

### ***Doesn't everyone work from home now?***

No – many people need to be in the office most days, whereas others come in for team activities – but for this reason the proposed council office is significantly smaller than the old one at Crowmarsh. The ground floor will have public space, a square, a café, meeting spaces, and accommodate the public-facing areas of the council. Above will be the more private offices, and above that commercial office space to generate income.

### ***Is it a “gamble with public money”?***

The plans have been carefully assessed by our finance officers and will be continually checked as the project progresses. These people do not “gamble”. Opponents often quote the outline cost but omit the insurance money (about £6m), which can only be used for this purpose, as well as any income gained from the old Crowmarsh site, the saving in rent and energy costs (about £1m p/a), and the income to be generated from renting out part of the building. Any regeneration of this site will cost money. The alternative is to leave the site derelict or sell it to a developer for yet more housing.

### **Dodwells Solar Farm**

The application for Dodwells Solar Farm (land north of M40 near Milton Common) was heard at SODC Planning Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> August, as was the cabling route (as a separate application). Tetsworth Parish Council spoke to the Committee and were supported by Great Haseley. I also spoke to highlight residents’ concerns about solar farm clustering in the Haseley Brook ward. The application was ultimately approved, along with the cable route. While none of us representing Haseley Brook objects to solar farms in principle, I believe a strong point was made on behalf of the ward’s villages. As with all Planning Committees, the meeting was recorded and can be viewed live or after the event on SODC’s YouTube channel, if residents are interested.

### **Have Your Say on our Landscapes and What’s Changing Them**

A new study has launched to better understand, protect and enhance the unique landscapes across South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are preparing a new Landscape Character Assessment and are calling for residents, businesses and visitors to share what they love about local landscapes and what they think is changing them. The study is being carried out by environmental consultancy Land Use Consultants (LUC) on behalf of the two councils.

Through a new interactive map, the public can add comments on different landscapes and places they value. This feedback will help LUC understand the local landscapes and what should be done to maintain them.

The Landscape Character Assessment will help ensure that future change respects and enhances local character and distinctiveness. The ultimate aim is to inform the councils’ work towards the Joint Local Plan, shape future policies and help guide planning application decisions for the districts.

The Consultation Hub is open for comments until 29 September 2023, which users can leave anonymously. To find out more and have your say, visit the new [Landscape Character Consultation Hub](#).

### **HIF1 Update**

The government has intervened after Oxfordshire County Council’s Planning and Regulation Committee resolved to refuse a county council planning application for four road and active travel projects in and around Didcot, known as HIF1. The application will now be considered at a public inquiry by a government-appointed planning inspector.

This is an OCC matter (and will I expect be addressed in your County Councillor's report), however a special SODC meeting was held on 29<sup>th</sup> August to talk about the issue. South Oxfordshire District Councillors reiterated the importance of local decision making, and requested that the public inquiry respect the views of affected communities in both Didcot and the surrounding villages by including the Council as a party to the inquiry.

The Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council, Lib Dem Councillor David Rouane, will write to Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, urging him to take local views into account and to make a swift decision on a planning application for £300million of transport infrastructure in the Didcot area.

The District Council will be emphasising to the inquiry how important the HIF1 infrastructure is to the delivery of housing and economic sites in the district's adopted Local Plan. However, the details are also important, and the council will be reinforcing the need for high quality design throughout as set out in the South Oxfordshire Design Guide and in the Didcot Garden Town Delivery Plan.

### **Community Grants**

Don't forget that applications are open for the Community Grant scheme until 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023. There is still funding available in the Haseley Brook ward, so please speak with me if you are thinking of applying. You can also find out more about the Councillor Community Grant scheme at [www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants) or by contacting the Community Enablement team at [grants@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:grants@southandvale.gov.uk).