

District Councillor Report
Haseley Brook ward
03 December 2024

Cllr Georgina Heritage



Meetings and Council Activity

There hasn't been a full council meeting over the past month but it's been a full calendar of Council and Cabinet activity, much of which is detailed later in this report.

In the Haseley Brook ward, the majority of communications I received from residents in November have related to flooding issues. Many of the problems have to be referred to Oxfordshire County Council (and some to Thames Water and/or our MP) and I can't always offer as much help as I would like, but I fully appreciate the serious problems residents are experiencing and I will always endeavour to assist or advise if I can. Applications for the Councillor grant scheme closed on 29th November and, perhaps unsurprisingly, two of the five Haseley Brook applications are for flood defence equipment.

With regard to this grant scheme, the total requested by the five applications in our ward is £10,700 which exceeds the £5,000 councillor grant allowance quite significantly, and it's a similar picture in most South Oxon wards. It will be a difficult task to work through the applications with the aim of distributing funds fairly, but it's great to see so many fantastic community-focused applications.

I recently presented to Cabinet the details for a new Performing Arts grant, which had been proposed and agreed in February 2024. I'll look forward to providing more information on this exciting community-based scheme soon. Over the past month I have also chaired the Health Improvement Partnership at County Hall and look forward to introducing the report from this meeting at the statutory Health & Wellbeing Board this Thursday 5th. Next week I shall be chairing the PCC and Chief Constable's annual report on 10th December, and preparing for Full Council on Thursday 12th.

48 affordable new homes in Thame and Wheatley

The first of three new projects to provide 48 new, genuinely affordable and energy efficient homes in Thame and Wheatley to meet local needs is now finished and has welcomed new tenants. The homes are a combination of new builds and conversions and will include one-bed houses and flats at affordable rent or under a shared ownership scheme, as well as independent living accommodation for over 55 and 60-year-olds.

Brought to life through SODC's partnership work with Soha Housing, Thame Community Land Trust and Thame & District Housing Association, the homes are largely funded by Section 106 affordable housing grants from developer contributions.

In Thame, the first residents have moved into their new homes and are enjoying energy saving solar roof panels and ground source heat pumps which will help keep energy bills low, as well as access to EV charging points.

A newly-built property in Wheatley of 12 one-bed apartments is also welcoming new tenants. The eco features mean the building will achieve zero carbon emissions when in use.

In addition, work is due to start on a third project of 31 affordable rent or shared ownership new-build houses and flats in Thame in 2025. The mix of new, affordable homes was established through a housing needs survey specific to Thame and will be available for people with a local connection to Thame.

Vision for the future of sports pitches and leisure facilities approved

A vision for the future of sports and leisure facilities across South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts was approved by both Cabinets last week. With both councils committed to creating healthy and inclusive communities, the aim is to support wellbeing through increasing opportunities to be physically active, with high-quality, accessible and affordable local facilities near to where people work and live. The councils have produced Leisure Facilities Assessments and Strategies and Playing Pitch Strategies that set out the current and future provision of facilities across the two districts. The reports identify the high level, strategic need to protect and enhance existing facilities, alongside the need to provide new facilities ranging from tennis courts, gym facilities and swimming pools, to pitches for football, rugby union, cricket and hockey.

The councils appointed external experts to help identify what was already available, what needed improvements and where new facilities could be introduced in the districts. Each district then ran consultations earlier this year between March and April 2024 asking sports clubs, leisure users and sports enthusiasts, alongside residents and town and parish councils, to have their say on sports and leisure facilities provision – and to give their feedback about what the Councils, in partnership with other organisations, need to protect, enhance, and provide.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils both unanimously approved the strategies at Cabinet meetings in November, and SODC's report can be viewed here: [Cabinet Agenda 28/11/24](#)

The next steps will be to create action plans linked to the strategies and to work in partnership with sports clubs, town and parish councils, national governing bodies, leisure providers and other organisations to allocate funding and support projects going forward.

Council Vehicle Decarbonisation Update

South Oxfordshire and Vale councils have taken delivery of their first electric food waste collection vehicle, as well as two new electric vans on their maintenance fleet, as part of the councils' ambitions to decarbonise vehicle fleets and move towards net zero.

The food waste vehicle, a Terberg EV ORUS, was delivered to the Culham depot of waste contractor Biffa earlier this autumn. It is being used throughout both district council areas as part of the fleet of 12 food waste collection trucks. The diesel food waste trucks each cover approximately, 26,000 miles per year, which with an average load would produce 30.9 tonnes of CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent). By changing to an electric food waste vehicle the councils expect to save more than 20 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent a year.

In addition to the reduction in carbon emissions, the EV will also save time and energy as it has a compressor function which means that despite being the same overall size as the other food waste trucks, it can take more food waste before it fills up. This means fewer trips to the food waste reprocessing facility in Wallingford to empty the truck before it can continue its collection round. The new vehicle also has a lift to allow the bins to be mechanically lifted and emptied into the waste compartment, which will be quicker for the collection crew as the current food trucks are loaded by hand. The vehicle like most EVs, is also quieter than diesel and petrol vehicles.

With regard to the maintenance vehicles I mentioned, the all-electric Renault Kangoo vans will be used by the parks team and the public toilet cleaning team to travel throughout both districts, as they conduct inspections, perform cleaning and maintenance work, and make deliveries to various sites.

These electric vehicles (EVs) will replace petrol and diesel vans, making a significant impact on reducing the councils' carbon emissions – it is estimated each van has saved 475.25kg of carbon dioxide equivalent in the first two months of use.

Their arrival is the beginning of a broader plan by the councils to fully convert the 12-strong fleet of maintenance vehicles used by the facilities, toilet cleaning, and parks teams to electric vans within the next three years.

Parks officer, Richard Embling, who uses one of the new EVs every day, said, "Charging is straightforward, as most of the areas I visit are in towns where we've installed chargers in council car parks. The range is decent, between 130 to 160 miles on a full 'tank' depending on the weather and the load I have onboard. This means I could go about three days without charging and still have some range left".

Food businesses asked to '♥ your area'

Food businesses in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse are being asked to play a key role in reducing litter by supporting the district councils' '♥ your area' campaign.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are looking to local traders as well as national names to display anti-litter stickers on takeaway food packaging and posters at their premises. By doing so, businesses can help to create cleaner, more welcoming streets for everyone.

The councils' '♥ your area' initiative aims to tackle the rising issue of litter in public spaces. During the summer banners and posters were displayed in prominent areas to remind people enjoying food and drink outdoors to bin their litter or take it home. With the weather getting colder, the councils are now focussing on encouraging takeaways and other food businesses to help spread the message.

The first business to sign up to the campaign is McDonald's whose local franchisee has agreed to add the councils' sticker to packaging handed to their drive-thru customers at Abingdon and Milton Heights and to walk-in customers at Botley and Didcot. A banner opposite the front door of the Abingdon premises has also been reminding people leaving the restaurant to bin their litter.

If you run a food business and would like to get involved, or know someone who does, you can email waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk

Leisure Facilities Update

We have some really positive leisure updates, including great news for gym users across South Oxfordshire, with a major investment by the council of £210,000 in new, state-of-the-art gym equipment. Park Sports Centre in Wheatley, Abbey Sports Centre in Berinsfield and Thame Leisure Centre will all benefit from new equipment, including treadmills, bikes, weights and resistance machines.

Working in partnership with leisure providers (GLL) has enabled the council to secure the best possible equipment at the best available price from Technogym. Users will start to see the new equipment from late November and during December. Where possible the equipment purchased is using the latest technology along with self-powered kit, ensuring residents continue to receive the latest cutting-edge equipment on the market.

Much of the current gym equipment at all the centres is over 10 years old and the gyms will benefit from a boost with new, modern equipment.

The Technogym equipment works off a 'Wellness Cloud' allowing residents to use Wi-Fi programmes across any leisure centre they are at for this system. All equipment is compatible with the Better Mobile App used by members to support their fitness programmes.

Old equipment will go back to Technogym and as much of the old equipment will be recycled as possible.

We're also pleased to report that SODC and its leisure provider, Better, are celebrating a successful 2024 summer season at Riverside Park and Pools, with almost 16,000 visitors to the outdoor pool which is a significant rise from previous years (up 17.8 per cent compared to 2023) and a testament to the pool's popularity. The season extended from 25 May to 8 September 2024, with the introduction of lots of new activities.

The newly redeveloped splash pad again proved to be an enormous hit with visitors, drawing consistent crowds and reaffirming its popularity as a key feature of the destination.

As well as the return of regular activities such as aqua aerobics, swimming lessons and swim doctors, some of the other standout offerings included a First Aid and Water Safety Day on 16 August, which included a children's water safety lesson, followed by an adult CPR and First Aid session. This year also saw the return of the popular Summer Solstice event, where the pool stayed open from 5am to 9pm so swimmers could enjoy both the sunrise and sunset.

The newly launched 'End of Season Dog Swim' was hugely popular. This sold-out event allowed dogs to take a splash in the pool, accompanied by their delighted owners. Due to its overwhelming success, the Dog Swim is sure to become a regular feature in future seasons.

The campsite has continued to be extremely popular, with guests frequently praising the experience and sharing positive feedback about their stay. Nearly every weekend saw the campsite fully booked, and there wasn't a night without campers.

Looking ahead to the next season there are plans to expand the site with more pitches and a fully accessible Changing Places facilities will be available at the Camping block toilets. Work is currently underway to improve the accessibility at the site with the installation of accessible moorings and improved pathways.