

# SODC Monthly Report - Cllr Caroline Newton

April 2023

## Council elections

Elections to SODC take place on Thursday 4 May. Please remember to take photo ID with you to the polling station in order to vote. Applications for postal votes are open until 5pm on Tuesday 18 April.

## Planning

Chalgrove: at a meeting with local councillors in March, Homes England (HE) confirmed they are still determined to push ahead with the development of Chalgrove Airfield. However, in light of opposition from the Civil Aviation Authority, HE seem to have gone back to the drawing board. They gave very little indication of their outline strategy, mitigation of traffic etc

Joint Local Plan: Work continues on the SODC and Vale of the White Horse Joint Local Plan (JLP) 2041. SODC Full Council in March passed a motion (tabled by me) to require officers to devise policies for the JLP to prevent villages and rural areas being overwhelmed by a concentration of solar farms.

5 Year Housing Land Supply: During the determination of a planning appeal (in Moreton), the planning inspector found SODC's HLS to be 4.74 years (as opposed to SODC's calculation of 5.3). the inspector didn't to consider the shortfall grave enough to override other planning considerations. The determination of an appeal on an application in Chalgrove is expected shortly. One of the main issues under scrutiny was the district's 5YHLS.

In this ward, there are a few applications which have been called in for consideration by the Planning Committee. Waiting times are long, however: there are currently about 40 planning applications that may need to be scheduled for Planning Committee hearings - with only 3 or 4 being considered at each committee meeting. Planning officers typically have case loads in the mid to high 30s.

## Housing

SODC has described the pressure on our housing services as a 'perfect storm' - with cost of living combining with a contraction in the private rental market, and the arrival of refugees from the Ukraine war to increase the competition for homes.

The most recent survey indicated there were 3 rough sleepers in South Oxfordshire, with new homelessness cases (or at risk of homelessness) rising to 40 households. 17 households were in emergency accommodation at the end of March. Of those 4 were Ukrainian households who could no longer be accommodated by their local hosts. To date, the SODC housing team have supported 139 Ukrainian families at risk of homelessness.

The most recent figures suggested there are currently 1283 households on our register.

In the meantime, discussions have begun with Oxford City Council about how residents on their housing register can apply for homes here in SODC. Oxford City residents can already apply to join the Vale of the White Horse District Council housing register.

The background to this is the legal requirement for neighbouring housing authorities to help address the need for social housing where one cannot identify enough land for their own residents. It was this "Duty to Cooperate" which led SODC to include an additional 4,000 houses to help Oxford meet their residents' need in the current South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

Work is underway in SODC to create policies to tackle homes left empty in this district, and to bring them into habitation. SODC's budget includes £1 million to purchase emergency accommodation. Two of the three homes this will fund have now been secured. A further £2 million was allocated to buy 5 homes for social housing.

SODC has decided to accept funding from the Dept for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (the "Local Authority Housing Fund"), grant funding to support the purchase of homes for use by Afghan or Ukrainian families. Officers are now investigating how this might be delivered in this district.

The council spent in full its Homelessness Prevention Grant and the top-up from government.

### **Nature**

The Environment Act 2021 mandates the creation of spatial strategies to restore nature. In this area, ours will be known as the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. It will be established in April, and led by the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership on which SODC is represented.

In order to support pollinators and other wildlife, the council is following “No Mow May” and “Let it Bee June” - letting the grass grow at certain sites in those two months to increase biodiversity.

### **Grant Schemes**

The Councillor Community Grant Scheme (£5000 for this ward) will open to bids 19 June - 6 Oct.                      The Capital Grant Scheme will open 11 Sept - 10 November

### **Electric Vehicles**

EV infrastructure: Oxfordshire (OCC) has been awarded over £4 mill to provide charging infrastructure, and a county-wide approach will be submitted to central government by May. It's critical that this funding is not just used in the cities and large funds, but spread amongst the villages where many residents don't have dedicated parking spaces/EV charging points.

EV Car Pool Club: A year-long trial of three EV cars has started - in Thame, Henley and Wallingford.

### **Waste**

DEFRA figures indicate that South Oxfordshire had the second highest recycling rate in the country, with 62.7%

I will not be seeking re-selection in May, so will cease to be your councillor on Monday 8 May. It has been a privilege to represent Haseley Brook at SODC for the last 6 years.

Cllr Caroline Newton

SODC, Haseley Brook Ward