

Report from SODC Councillors

Birthday celebrations for our Queen's 90th year.

We offered our Town and Parish councils a grant towards any community events they were holding to celebrate the Queen's 90th birthday. 71 out of 86 parish and town councils in South took us up on the offer and we distributed over £50,000 towards these events. If you took advantage of this, we hope that you and your residents had a really great time!

High Court judgement on planning challenges

As previously reported on 5 May the High Court ruled on two appeal decisions for developments in Chinnor. The judge hearing the case agreed with the inspector that our policy didn't show the required housing information and he also made a number of comments about our approach which we have used to inform options for our emerging Local Plan.

Until our Local Plan has been agreed and is in place, it does mean that our position is weakened when it comes to resisting Planning Applications. There is a Bill going before Parliament this session which MP John Howell has worked on which will help us, but legislation does take time.

This phase of Local Plan 2032 consultations is still open, and we ask that you urge as many of your residents to provide feedback on this as possible. It will influence the future development of our District so the more responses we receive, the more able we are to reflect our public's views. The consultation closes on August the 19th.

More Planning Matters.

Some of our Councillors have worked with our Planning Officers to produce a simple guide on how members of the public should reply to Planning Permission Consultations. We are hoping that this will help people respond, and improve their understanding of what does and does not constitute a Material Planning Consideration.

We hope that all of our Town and Parish Councils will make this available to their residents via their web sites and a copy is attached with this newsletter.

July Town And Parish Forum

We held our Town and Parish forum in July. These help us to stay in touch with town and parish councils and keep them up to date with the work we're doing. At the July event we provided updates on our bid for district-based unitary councils and progress on our local plans. We also took the chance to talk to councils about our new corporate plan.

These are an important opportunity for dialogue and in future, we aim to hold two of these each year, instead of just the one.

Golf club lands in the rough

Following the destruction of 29 protected pine trees in the North Stoke conservation area we successfully prosecuted Thames Valley Golf Limited, owners of the Springs Hotel and Golf Club. The company was fined £8,000 and ordered to pay over £1,500 costs. If you believe that there have been violations, please let the Enforcement Team know so they can investigate and take appropriate action.

Five Councils update - Changes from 1 August

The first of our services to be handed over to Capita and VINCI on 1 August has been completed. The only exception to this is that we're going to put back the launch of the new system for people to pay for their car parking by phone by a month, until 1 September. A benefit of doing this is that it gives us bit more time to let people know the change is taking place, but in the meantime people can continue to use the existing RingGo system as normal.

Devolution/unitary councils update

We need to understand how the recent changes in the government may affect our proposals for devolution and local government reorganisation. Following discussions with civil servants, we've now had a very clear message from central government that devolution proposals should have broad support across all tiers of local government in the area they would cover. We don't currently have this in Oxfordshire so we've collectively agreed to again explore whether we can reach a set of proposals we can all sign up to.

This is likely to take a little while so don't expect anything to happen publicly for a couple of months and we've postponed publication of the PWC and Grant Thornton studies, and plans for consultation are now on hold.

Cutting down on council tax fraud

Last year our fraud investigators helped to prevent more than £410,000 in council tax discounts from being fraudulently claimed across the South and Vale Districts, and they also recovered more than £160,000 that had already been paid out to illegal claims. If you or your residents have concerns that someone may be carrying out a fraud, please do report it so we can look into it. It's your money that they are claiming!

New grants scheme

We've launched a new revenue grants scheme - any non-profit organisation can apply, like a charity or local village committee. The grants are from £10,000 to £100,000 over four years and can be used on revenue spending - so things like rent and rates, salary costs, and marketing and publicity.

We're launching these grants to help us meet our new corporate objectives, including investing in the district's future and building thriving communities. Applications are open from 27 July until 15 September this year. We know that councils spreading the word is one of the main ways groups find out about grant funding, so it'd be a great help if you could let your communities know - just put them in contact with the grants team on 01235 422405.

This is just a brief summary of the work we are doing.