

## **District Councillors' Report 2018 / 2019**

**Dealing with Issues** - We have continued to actively support our Parish Councils and residents with questions and issues concerning development ranging from questions about fences and hedges up to issues around new major developments. We continue to see developers submitting speculative applications which are not in accordance with Neighbourhood Plan aspirations but at Appeal, we are having greater success due to the adoption of NDPs as we have maintained Year Land Supply above 5 Years. Additionally, the Growth Board Agreement means we now only need to maintain a 3 Year supply for the time being, although this should be treated with caution as we need to maintain performance above target for when this concession expires.

We continue to work with our MP John Howell in trying to improve control of development. John has been the driving force behind the Neighbourhood Planning Law which is now in place and he is driving a Private Members Bill through Parliament which will seek to limit Developers' right to appeal where a Neighbourhood Plan is in place.

We are delivering affordable housing at a rate well above our target. As at December 2018 we had achieved 263 against the cumulative target of 188 and the Annual Target of 250. Indications are that by the end of the (council) year we will will have delivered at least 300 affordable homes.

Didcot Garden Town is a major part of our plan for development in the District, offering a significant number of jobs and home. Work on this project continues with various funding opportunities being announced.

Our plans to 'refresh' Berinsfield continue to progress and will bring significant benefits to this community and the wider district.

An example of where development can bring benefits is the Market Place Mews development in Henley which brought us £300,000 for the small ransom strip on the edge of the site.

Work on the new Local Plan continues having been paused and revisited following important legal advice and will shortly be submitted for examination by the Planning Inspector. Whilst additional development is never welcome in the majority of our communities, the growing population, and the need for housing mean that unpopular decisions must be taken. Whilst there are various calculations used which suggest a lower level of housing will be needed, we have taken the best possible expert advice in determining the location and scale of development in respect of housing need, environmental impact, pollution mitigation, infrastructure and future employment requirements.

Through our support for the Growth Deal, we are also supporting a bid for the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) which will help provide the much needed improvements to our infrastructure.

**Customer satisfaction** - The council carries out a survey of residents every few years to learn about peoples' satisfaction with local area and the services we provide. The latest survey took place in January and February 2018. According to the survey, 77 per cent of residents were satisfied with the council's work. While the same amount felt the quality of services provided by the council was good but the number of residents who agreed the council was providing value for money has dropped by five per cent, in line with the national trend. However, 63-per cent were satisfied – this is higher than the national average, which has ranged from 47 to 56 per cent over the last five years, according to the Local Government Association.

The survey also found rated most important by residents were community safety, waste and recycling, street cleaning, environmental protection and sport and leisure – and three-quarters or more of people were satisfied with the way these services were delivered.

**Business Support And Development** – We have set up the South and Vale Business awards to celebrate our fantastic business community with the Award Ceremony to be held at the fantastic Williams F1 Facility at Grove, near Wantage. Another initiative is the Pop-Up Business School to help future entrepreneurs get started (each a week long). The next one in Berinsfield starts on the 29<sup>th</sup> April. Although a joint OCC, SODC & BT initiative, the Better Broadband project continues to generate benefits for our communities with the 600<sup>th</sup> cabinet going live on the 15<sup>th</sup> March at Sydenham/Emmington near Chinnor.

**Community Safety** - Our Community Safety Team work closely with the CS Partnership strengthening the County's contributions; for example on how to identify cases of Female Genital Mutilation and on how to spot examples of modern slavery. We continue to grow the Safer Places initiative across the District and the "Ask For Angela" Scheme continues to grow in the District's pubs.

**Waste And Recycling** - We have again performed well in these areas being ranked 1<sup>st</sup> Place on the County and 2<sup>nd</sup> place nationally.

Our level of complaints in respect of bins and waste collection is the lowest in the top 50 performers, running at less than half the average rate per 100,000. This is a good performance given that we make over 1,000,000 collections per annum. Performance has also been greatly improved by the introduction of the new fleet of vehicles by Biffa ahead of schedule due to reliability issues.

**Finances** - South Oxfordshire remains a financially sound Council. Despite increasing financial restrictions, we have been able to maintain our full range of services with a minimal £5.00 increase in our part of the council tax. We are conscious that pressures will increase as the Central Government Support Grant is now zero and we still do not have agreement on Business Rates Retention or New Homes Bonus (the grant given for houses that have been completed.) Our sound and prudent approach to money has enabled us to maintain our Capital & Revenue Grants scheme.

**Community and Grants** - This scheme has continued to provide much-needed funding for facilities in our communities. For example, a community pub is due to be renovated and brought back into use thanks to a £50,000 grant from South Oxfordshire District Council.

Other projects include a new outdoor gym in Warborough, improvements to the village shop in Little Milton and a new roof for the village hall in Sonning Common.

Goring Village Hall will get new lighting, sound equipment and curtains to improve its stage, and Woodcote Village Hall will benefit from electrical and lighting improvements and a new projector.

Woodcote Parish Council is also receiving money to help install a pathway from its new zebra crossing, across the recreation ground to the school.

Over the course of the current financial year, the council has awarded more than £820,000 to community projects across the district.

At last summer's Oxfordshire Charity and Volunteer Awards, the South Stoke Community Village Shop won the best group in South Oxfordshire, an award which was sponsored by the district council.

This was in recognition of the hard work by the volunteers to create this community hub in a rural part of South Oxfordshire. This has obviously been appreciated by local people judging by its success.

**So Community Lottery Draw** – Over £28,000 has been raised by our local lottery which has been given to 67 good causes locally. Remember that we make no money from this; after costs all of the money is distributed to local good causes.

**Leisure and well-being** – Use of our leisure facilities continues to increase with over 750,000 visits to SODC Leisure facilities in the period April – December 2018.

Go Active Gold continues to grow, as does it's off-shoot Go Active Juniors, helping people at both ends of their lives who might not otherwise do so, to get involved in sporting activities. The Go Active Gold team aim to encourage people aged 60 and over living in rural areas to live more active lifestyles. Go Active Juniors is for anyone up to 18 years old. The project aims to increase participation in sport and physical activity by getting young people active in our area. The team offer a range of support including helping to find new coaches to deliver sports sessions, assist clubs to set-up new activity sessions and help clubs with equipment.

**Food Standards** – We continue to maintain the high standard of service by our Team in this important area. A number of businesses were subject to enforcement notices and we have successfully prosecuted a number for serious breaches of the regulation.

This is just a short summary of some of the things that the Council has done. If you are interested in a more in-depth report of the metrics of how we perform as a Council, these can be found in the monthly reports on our web site at:

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/about-us/how-we-work/policy-and-performance/performance-reports/performance-reports-201819>

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