

Title	District Councillor's Report
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Coronavirus response

The newly established Community Hub at SODC has been extremely active in supporting vulnerable residents over the past couple of months. Activity levels have now started to reduce and are much lower in recent weeks, which very much reflects the way that local groups have established strong support networks for their own communities. The Hub's new opening hours are 9am to 6pm, Monday to Saturday and closed on Sundays.

As you can appreciate, these tasks are new to many of the staff at SODC, and some of the technical systems have had to be redeveloped to cope (e.g. the business rates system is set up to take money in from local businesses, not to send funds the other way). All of these new tasks also had to be absorbed at the same time as Council staff were being moved to home-working, having to deal with their own personal situations (home-schooling, self-isolating etc) and maintaining existing services such as planning and waste collection. We are very proud of the way SODC staff have stepped up to the challenge and have responded to the new demands being placed on them.

Council Funding

There was a letter from the Housing Minister, Robert Jenrick, suggesting that Coronavirus funding has been given to County and District councils to pass on to Town and Parish councils.

The Local Government Association have pointed out in response to Robert Jenrick that this funding has not been provided.

SODC recommend to Thame Town Council that direct expenditure on Coronavirus and losses of income due to Coronavirus are reported to the Government via the monthly financial report submitted by SODC and Oxfordshire county council. This will make clear to Government how much funding needs to be provided to Thame.

SODC have made grant funding available for community groups dealing with Coronavirus and we are happy to pass this on to Thame Town Council to make the awards. The amount available is £4000 and this can be paid immediately.

There is also the High Street Safety Fund, which is EU funding for local authorities to help our high streets move into the next phase of reduced lockdown. There is £125k for South Oxfordshire but strict rules on how it can be spent. Information is on the Government website, some examples of valid uses are installation of hand sanitisers, changes to parking to allow wider pavements, traffic management (pedestrianisation), promotion of the high street to the public, temporary barriers and signage.

Planning Committee

SODC restarted planning committee meetings on 28 May. For virtual planning committee, anyone wishing to take part will need to submit a written statement by email in advance, which will be shared with all the planning committee members. SODC are aiming to introduce full online public participation in due course, when the software security issues around public participation are resolved.

The planning process has been temporarily amended in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 emergency. South Oxfordshire will follow the same process as Vale of

White Horse for the next 6 months and all towns & parishes have been provided with details. Officers consulted all political group leaders on SODC before making the change.

The temporary process is as follows:

- If the Town council objects to a **Minor** application, a planning officer will contact them to explain the likely recommendation and seek to resolve their planning concerns, but can determine the application, unless one of the ward members calls it in, in which case it will go before Head of Planning + Chair+ Vice Chair+ Ward member to resolve, and they will decide if it should go to planning committee or not for a decision.
- If the Town council objects to a **Major** application it will go to planning committee for a decision if the planning officer recommendation is for approval.
- **'Other'** applications (householder) eg extensions - unchanged - do not go to planning committee if the parish/town council objects, unless the ward member calls it in, or the planning officers decides it should go to committee.

The statutory time limits remain unchanged as 13 weeks for major development and 8 weeks for all other types of development (unless the application is subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment, in which case a 16 week limit applies).

The public consultation period for an Application is 21 days (from the date the letter/notice is posted), and if there is a significant change to the Application following amended plans, a further public consultation period, usually 14 days, is undertaken. The Application can be called in to a Planning Committee by a district councillor with planning reasons up to 28 days from registration.

Local Plan

Proposed modifications to the emerging Local Plan 2034 are being drafted for submission to the Inspector and some have already been reviewed and accepted.

For example, a policy on zero carbon standards in new housing has been added to the plan.

It has now been confirmed that the Examination in Public (EIP) will be held virtually, in July and August, commencing at 10.00 on Tuesday 14th July.

Only those who made representations on the plan when it was being reviewed in early 2019 are eligible to take part in the Examination online, but anyone will be able to watch proceedings online.

Adapting our roads to accommodate safe cycling and walking

An open letter was sent recently to Cllr Constance at Oxfordshire County Council regarding Oxfordshire's first tranche of emergency active travel measures:

We are the cycling champions for the City of Oxford, Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire. While we welcome Oxfordshire's moves towards responding to the Covid 19 crisis and the reduced use of public transport and the need for people to give each other space, we are writing to urge the County to take more ambitious and effective measures and to do so quickly. We wrote to you on 6 May calling for urgency and a month later, and following the announcement of 5 June, we are repeating our call.

The Department for Transport will provide funding only if it makes a material change to the amount of space available to people walking and on bicycles. The measures announced so far amount mostly to the maintenance of existing cycle lanes, including vegetation clearance and line repainting, and to some creation of modal filters on some side streets mostly in the city. This is not in the spirit

of the DfT instructions and nor will it create the space we need for people using active travel as the schools return and shops reopen.

Other parts of the country have already put in place pop-up lanes to make space for people on bikes and foot.

We need urgency before motor traffic builds to previous levels. We are offering to work with the County to create immediate and ambitious measures in our districts.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Louise Upton, Walking & Cycling Champion, Oxford City Council

Cllr Dan Levy, Walking & Cycling Champion, WODC

Cllr Eric de la Harpe, Walking & Cycling Champion, VOWH

Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Walking & Cycling Champion, SODC

There is also a website called www.widenmypath.com where you can submit a suggestion for improvements to be made to an existing pavement or cycle path. Apparently, it is monitored by OCC, so worth using!

Support for Local Businesses

The South and Vale Business Support Service has received a huge increase in visits to its website, particularly since it is responsible for administering the business support schemes announced by the Government. Since 3rd June, SODC are processing applications for the new discretionary grants fund, aiming to support small businesses which were not eligible for the earlier rounds of funding. However, they have warned that the funds available total only 5% of the amount available under previous programmes, so they will not be able to respond positively to all applications. Further information is available at <https://www.svbs.co.uk>

Car Parking Charges re-introduced

With the gradual re-opening of shops and other facilities, car-parking charges have been reintroduced from 8th June in SODC-owned car parks. This will go some way to restore some of the Council's lost income. NHS staff and care workers who display a national COVID-19 pass can continue to park for free. To claim a pass they need to contact their employer who will issue a permit to park in council car parks.

To avoid having to touch the payment screen make sure you download the Connect Cashless app – connectcashlessparking.com and pay online instead (if you have a smart phone).

Oxfordshire 2050

Feed into Oxfordshire 2050; how do you see Oxfordshire's future for living and working, connectivity and Climate Change? Contribute **your** ideas!

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