

Title	District Councillor's Report
Author	Cllrs Bretherton, Barker & Gregory
Date	2 nd March 2021

2021/2022 Budget

At its meeting on 11th February, Council agreed the revenue budget for 2021/22 in line with our statutory duties to set the Council Tax and to determine the level of deficit that will need to be covered by reserve funds. Given the on-going uncertainties around future income streams (e.g. from leisure centres or from central government grants), the budget will be kept under review and, if necessary, revised mid-year.

Community Grants

We are pleased to report that the full amount of £5000 per councillor was awarded to community organisations in Thame. The scheme was over-subscribed so we were unable to award the full amounts to all applicants

Organisation	Purpose	Amount
Thame Shed	Setup project	£3142
Red Kite Centre	Family centre funding	£2670
Thame Players	New audio equipment	£3000
Thame Town Council	Blue plaque	£1000
Thame Arts & Literature	Online festival	£1500
Allotments	Road Repairs	£450
Inner Wheel Club	Senior citizens Christmas tea	£500
Angling Club	Fish refuge on river Thame	£990
Thame Equipment Bank	Equipment including litter pickers	£1248
21 st Century Thame	2000 trees planting project	£500

2021 Elections

The Government has now confirmed that local elections will take place in early May as scheduled, and officers are working on the logistics planning needed to accommodate both voting and vote-counting. In Thame there are Police & Crime Commissioner and County Council elections

We would strongly encourage people to consider applying for a postal vote if they are concerned about voting in person – completed forms can be emailed this year.

New Parking Order agreed

After public consultation, a new Car Park Order was approved by Cabinet and Scrutiny, which aims to improve consistency in charges across the district and to address the financial loss in the car parking service after more than 10 years without any increases.

From 1st April, the changes are:

- All SODC-owned car parks will provide one hour's free parking at any time of the day
- Car parking charges will apply on Sunday from 10am
- Introduction of half-priced parking permits for electric vehicles.

Ecological Emergency Declared

At the same meeting, the Council declared an Ecological Emergency and has now renamed CEAC as the CEEAC – the Climate *and Ecological* Emergencies Advisory Committee. This aligns completely with the top priority Theme in our new Corporate Plan – “Protect and Restore our Natural World”, and provides a strong mandate for officers to work on monitoring, measuring and reducing the ecological impact of our activities, particularly in Planning. A new Biodiversity Steering Group will be established, and we will work closely with others (e.g. The Earth Trust) to develop Nature Recovery Networks and a Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire. A further motion will ban the use of sky lanterns on Council-owned land and advise others against allowing these small hot air balloons which can cause significant damage to land and livestock.

OxCam-Arc

The Government has announced “an ambitious plan to unleash the economic and cultural potential of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, to transform it into one of the world’s premier growth corridors and a world-leader in sustainability”.

SODC Leader Sue Cooper issued a statement in response:

“Finally there is some recognition of the pressures on local infrastructure and community wellbeing from the Government. South Oxfordshire is only a small part of this large Arc stretching across to Cambridge, but we can play an important role in setting the right direction for this new body and ensuring it is accountable to elected councillors and local residents, not just the Government.

“The knowledge economy, including local successes such as the Covid vaccine development, can be a strong part of the rebuilding of the UK economy, but this should be by working with other areas of the UK, not by building excessive numbers of houses around and between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge.

“We must also do what we can to ensure that Arc projects protect and enhance our natural environment and so we welcome the continued opportunity to work with the government and our partners to explore how we can best achieve this. I also intend to use our collective local influence to push for stronger environmental planning policies and investment in green technology.

“South Oxfordshire District Council policy remains against the building of an Expressway from Oxford to Cambridge and we will continue to watch the Arc very closely to ensure it does not act as a means of un-pausing this road building project.”

Appointment of Tree Champions for South Oxfordshire

SODC has appointed two cllrs as Tree Champions – Cllr Peter Dragonetti (Green) and Cllr Ian Snowdon (Conservative). The remit for this role is to:

- Promote the value of trees and woodlands
- Promote woodland protection/conservation and tree growing initiatives in the district
- Work with officers and members to develop and promote a Tree Policy and Strategy
- Raise awareness of the statutory protections for trees and woodland within local communities, town and parish councils.