

Title	District Councillor’s Report
Author	Cllrs Kate Gregory, Pieter-Paul Barker & David Bretherton
Parish	Thame Town Council
Date	16 th November 2021

Garden Waste Collections

The garden waste collection service should be back to normal now and we have been told that any backlog should be sorted by the end of November. Those using this service have had their subscription period extended by 3 months. The waste management team also hope to be able to start processing new subscriptions by the end of November.

Capital Grant funding available to help good causes in South Oxfordshire

South Oxfordshire District Council has launched a new round of its Capital Grant Scheme with grants available of up to £75,000 for local voluntary and community organisations and town and parish councils.

This grant can fund up to 50 per cent of the total cost of capital projects like contributing to buying a building, replacing or making improvements to long term assets such as play areas and equipment.

Voluntary and community organisations and town and parish councils will also need to consider how their project will contribute to at least one of the council’s Corporate Plan 2020-2024 priorities, such as ‘protect and restore our natural world’, ‘action on the climate emergency’ or ‘improved economic and community well-being’.

New offices at the Gateway site opposite Didcot station

The concept design for the new district council building at Didcot Gateway has been approved, and the detailed design process is now getting underway.

Because of its location, the building is being designed to reflect the town’s industrial and railway heritage as well as meeting the principles set out in the Didcot Garden Town delivery plan, meaning it reflects both local history and the town’s future.

In line with the councils’ commitments to tackle the climate emergency, the offices will be built to meet a strict sustainability standard, known as the BREEAM Excellent standard – this would put the building in the top 10 per cent of new non-domestic buildings in the UK in terms of its sustainability performance. To help meet that standard, the building will feature solar panels on its roof and possible also on covered parking spaces.

To help the councils meet their commitments to building stable finances, the building will also include commercial office space the councils can let to a third party. The land is owned by SODC already and is part of the Didcot Station “Gateway” regeneration, led by Homes England who own most of the land in that area.

The location opposite the station should help in our efforts to encourage sustainable commuting and a hybrid model of remote and office working. The central site will also be more accessible to the public than the current expensive offices at Milton Park.

SODC car parks changes

Next year there will be some minor changes to how parking is enforced in our car parks. This will include changes to the way in which people can appeal a parking fine, and the introduction of two set levels of fine, one for more serious offences like parking in a disabled bay without a badge, and a lower level for less serious misdemeanours like overstaying your time.

Public notices informing people how the orders will change are published. People will then have 21 days to submit any comments. Changing a parking order is quite a long process and then signage in all our car parks will need altering – as a result, the changes won't come into effect until 1 April 2022.

The parking orders need altering so that they match the Traffic Management Act 2004 legislation that is operating across Oxfordshire following the move to Civil Parking Enforcement from 1 November. Enforcement in district council car parks will continue to be carried out by Saba. This will remain separate from on-street enforcement, which will be carried out by Oxfordshire County Council.

Government Planning Reforms

Following a motion proposed by Cllr Anne-Marie Simpson and seconded by Cllr Pieter-Paul Barker, Cllr David Rouane, Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council, has written to HM Government to call on it to scrap the current proposals for planning reform and instead boost rights of local residents to engage in the planning process.

Cllr Rouane asks the government to transform the process into one that assesses the 'climate fitness' of a district and plans for growth within the environmental capacity of that area, looking at carbon emissions, water availability and the pressing need for nature recovery at scale.

Cllr Rouane also calls for a thorough review of Building Regulations and the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure require property developments to be built to net-zero standards in manufacture and use, and reiterates the council's belief that the 5 Year Housing Land Supply measure is flawed and inappropriate, as councils should not be held to account for the actions – or indeed lack of action – of developers, with regard to the delivery of housing on allocated or approved development sites.

Decarbonisation of leisure centres

In order to achieve its own carbon reduction targets, South Oxfordshire District Council needs to be able to successfully decarbonise its leisure centres. Funding to carry out this work has been made available by the government through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund. However, so far, the fund has been significantly oversubscribed and the application process made more difficult by stop-start initiatives and significant restrictions on how the money can be provided.

South Oxfordshire District Council believes it would be more effective to resource local areas to deliver their own decarbonisation strategies, meaning long-term funding to boost the future of public swimming pools, potentially decrease the long-term cost of operating pools, and contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions. This would also provide local suppliers with the confidence to invest in staff, skills and the technology.

Following a motion proposed by Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers and seconded by Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Cllr David Rouane, Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council, has written to the department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to highlight the barriers councils currently face when applying to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund, and the urgent need for a long-term approach to decarbonising leisure centres in order to support local authorities to lead the way in the delivery of a net zero future for leisure.

Retrofitting homes for energy efficiency

Following a motion proposed by Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye and seconded by Cllr George Levy, Cllr Rouane has also written to the government to urge it to address retrofitting as a priority. The letter highlights the need to recognise retrofitting's importance in achieving our national and international carbon emission targets and calls for adequate funding to be made available for all local authorities in any retrofit strategy.

Finally, the council calls for the government to develop long term support for householders, including changes in relevant laws, guidance and tax regulations, and to encourage businesses and the skills development needed to support retrofitting.

All of the Leader's letters can be viewed on the SODC website at <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/about-the-council/official-correspondence/>