

<b>Title</b>	District Councillors' Report to Thame Town Council
<b>Authors</b>	Cllrs Pieter-Paul Barker, David Bretherton & Kate Gregory
<b>Date</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> November 2023

### Joint Local Plan

SODC is in the process of developing the **Joint Local Plan 2041** with Vale of White Horse with the objective of improving planning policies to help address the climate emergency, restore nature, and meet local housing needs.

SODC Cabinet on 30<sup>th</sup> November will receive a report seeking approval to go out to consultation on our Joint Local Plan Preferred Options. The report will be accompanied by a number of appendices:

- Preferred Options Consultation Document
- Joint Local Plan in a Nutshell
- Emerging Policies Map (link to the interactive website)
- Equalities Impact Assessment
- A link to the full JLP Preferred Options Consultation Document in ArcGIS Storymap
- The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Report
- The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Preliminary Screening Report

The public consultation will take place in January and February (known as Regulation 18).

### Over £440,000 awarded to support swimming pools in South and Vale

Swimming pools across South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse have been awarded a total of £441,542. The award for running costs will ensure opening hours are not reduced. There has been huge increase in costs to manage the pools over the last few years due to rising energy & staff costs; GLL will use this additional revenue to help finance the maintenance of the Thame pool.

### District Councillor Grant Scheme

The cllr grant scheme continues to be funded at £5000 per cllr per year. The scheme is open for applications until 1<sup>st</sup> December and currently there are funds available.

### Green Space Grants

If you know a local volunteer group or organisation helping nature, they could be eligible for funding from SODC. We've teamed up with Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) to help communities protect and enhance their local green spaces and improve access for residents to benefit from being in nature. The next grant application deadline is midday 8 January 2024. If you've got an idea and want to give your project a boost, we recommend you have a quick chat with TOE before applying. Contact Rachel on [admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk)

### Food & Warmth Grant Scheme

A new food and warmth grant will help support people in Thame this winter who may otherwise struggle to afford essential things. The SODC grant is aimed at local voluntary and community groups, and town and parish councils, who can use it to support those most in need in the districts. Organisations can apply for grants between £2,000 to £5,000, or up to £10,000 for collaborative projects between groups of two or more organisations. The grant can fund projects providing food and warmth to people who may otherwise struggle to access these crucial essentials over the winter.

The grant can cover capital and revenue costs for projects that support people with food and warmth, such as buying food and essential supplies such as household cleaning products, toiletries,

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hot water bottles and blankets and cooking equipment such as saucepans and slow cookers. Projects might also include cooking clubs, gardening clubs and educational activities that promote healthy food choices and saving energy.

The grant scheme opened 23 October 2023 and closes at midday 27 November 2023. Decisions are expected to be made within four weeks.

### **Rural Prosperity Fund Grants**

The Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) is designed to support capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure that help to strengthen the rural economy and communities. Grant funding is available for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises, growing the local social economy and supporting innovation, investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups.

Example projects include the diversification of farm buildings outside of agriculture, establishment of community businesses and net-zero infrastructure. Town and Parish Councils, public sector organisations, higher and further education institutions, private sector companies, registered charities, constituted community-based organisations, social enterprises (like CICs) are eligible for the scheme.

Interested parties are encouraged to submit their application before midday on Friday 24 November 2023 by visiting the SODC website. A grant panel will then meet in February 2024 to discuss each project and assess which projects should receive funding.

### **Affordable housing grant to help address urgent need**

As part of the district council's work to help meet the urgent need for genuinely affordable housing in the region, local developers, Community Land Trusts and self-builders can apply for a Section 106 affordable housing grant to build affordable homes that meet the councils' climate criteria.

The council approved an improvement to the existing affordable housing policy to enable funds from Section 106 developer contributions to be used as a grant to build affordable homes that are energy efficient and cheaper for residents to live in and heat. The policy includes a revamped application process which includes clear evaluation guidelines and free expert consultation services for applicants who would like additional guidance.

The new application form now includes questions which determine how projects will minimise energy use and carbon emissions, as well as how they have identified locally appropriate species and set up long term management plans if they are adding tree planting and biodiversity improvements.

### **Market House Makeover**

Citizens Advice invested in an internal makeover of their offices in Market House recently. The exterior of the building also needs maintenance which was budgeted for this financial year by SODC. The cost is considerably higher than expected, but the extra spending has been approved and work is being scheduled.

The Changing Places toilet installation could not be done before the Government grant expiry date, as Market House is a listed building. Therefore the work to refurbish the whole toilet block will now be funded from developer contributions (CIL) and done next year.

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### **Allotment Sites**

The Persimmon (Robin Gibb) and Bellway (Warren Mead) developments both include land set aside for allotments. However long after house building has finished, the allotments are not available for use.

This has been escalated to SODC officers, who are negotiating the final transfer agreements with the developers. This includes ensuring that developers have completed all the site works agreed such as landscaping and paths and made good. When the development has final approval and land transfer is carried out to local authorities, this will include Thame Town Council taking ownership of the allotments so that they can be made available to applicants.

At the time of writing, the final transfer agreements have not been signed by the developer's legal teams and work continues to secure final agreement between SODC and the developers.

### **CCTV**

South Oxfordshire District Council upgraded its public space CCTV cameras in Thame town centre. The digital cameras directly replaced the outdated analogue CCTV system, providing our CCTV operators and emergency services with much better picture clarity to help support public safety.

### **Empty properties for Ukrainians**

People with vacant properties are encouraged to consider letting them to Ukrainian refugees. People with suitable properties will receive, one month rent in advance, a security deposit payment; and a £1,000 thank you payment. Contact: [oxfordshirehousingcapacity@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:oxfordshirehousingcapacity@southandvale.gov.uk)

### **Changes to postal and proxy voting**

A series of national changes were introduced on 31 October for postal and proxy voting, and our officers have prepared this briefing note for members to explain them in a bit more detail. The changes include new identity checking requirements, online applications, restrictions on the number of people a person can act as a proxy for and maximum periods for absent voter applications.

### **Recent motions passed by SODC Council**

At its meeting on 12th October, SODC unanimously passed two motions brought by members. The first was to ensure that all contractors awarded business by the Council sign up to paying the Real Living Wage to their employees. This will mean that the Council can apply to become a Real Living Wage certified employer (direct staff are already paid at least this amount) and will ensure that, where contractors are benefiting from index-linked increases in their fees, they will reward their own employees accordingly. (It was discovered at a Joint Scrutiny meeting recently that Saba, the firm which operates the SODC and Vale car parks, only pays the national minimum wage and is struggling to recruit)

The second motion regretted the Government's recent reductions in its climate targets and called on the Leader of the Council to write to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, requesting a regulatory impact assessment of the outcome of their policy changes, and to seek an assurance and rationale for how they consider these policy changes to be compliant with their statutory obligations to meet current and future carbon budgets.