

SODC A Conservative District Councillor's View **(Or What The Council Is Doing)**

December 2020.

CoVID-19 Vaccination

This week we received the very welcome news that the first Covid-19 vaccine has been approved for use in the UK by the MHRA (the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency). The strict approval process it has gone through means that the approved vaccine, and any other vaccines approved in the future, will not only be safe, but will also be our best defence against the virus.

Detailed planning for the rollout of the vaccination programme is well underway both locally and nationally. We're working with our colleagues in the NHS to support this. There will be a phased delivery of the programme, based on the priority groups set out nationally by the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

Vaccinations will be offered in three main ways:

- **Hospital Hubs** - NHS sites
- **Local Vaccine Centres** - GP-led services, which could include using GP practices and community facilities
- **Vaccination Centres** – large sites, such as sports and conference venues, set up for high volumes of people

From a hands-on perspective we're currently supporting our health colleagues with the co-ordination and delivery of the local vaccine programme.

Something we can all do is put our faith in the system to deliver this process just as effectively as every other challenge faced so far like the shielding programming during the first lockdown and delivering a number of much needed financial packages to support our businesses.

Further up-dates will be on the council's a web site as they become available.

Post in the Ward

Following on from our report a couple of months ago, although there was again a short improvement in the postal service, we continue to get reports of delays in delivery with some being over a week for first class post. Lynn has written once more to a senior Royal Mail Manager for our region and continues to seek an improvement in the service in our Ward. The initial reason given for postal delays was that staff had been severely impacted by Covid-19, causing a shortage of employees to sort and deliver the post. They stated that they are trying to improve the coverage for the area served by the sorting office in Thame. Interestingly, we have now heard that not only Didcot

but also Wantage and Wallingford are experiencing similar issues. This would seem to suggest that any support for the Thame sorting office, that has been provided by other Sorting centres in the past, will not be available until the Covid-19 emergency is resolved. If businesses and individuals in the area are having issues caused by the postal service we would suggest that you raise complaints with Royal Mail.

Planning

Local Plan 2034

The situation on LP2034 is that it has completed Examination and Consultation and will be before Full Council on 10th December for Adoption. Today we are, uncertain that the Administration will comply with the Secretary of State's direction and what those consequences might be, although we know very well here in Chinnor, and in Benson and Wallingford, what the absence of an effective plan feels like, with Chinnor receiving 775 homes above the planned 165.

We would not normally use this report to make a political point, but the delay has likely cost the tax-payer – you – in excess of £1,000,000. This is not an exact figure as this has not been forthcoming when requested and is the subject of a Freedom Of Information request for which we are waiting an answer, but it is based on statements on the new cost. Below we have reproduced a letter written by another District Councillor to the Henley Standard which summarises the present position.

"To give them credit, the Lib Dem and Green councillors that form the administration at SODC have at least been consistent in claiming they can reverse the draft Local Development Plan and still protect South Oxfordshire from uncoordinated, speculative development.

But sadly, since they first made these claims in the local election campaign in 2018, the Lib Dems and Greens have been peddling a lie. They have been told repeatedly by their own SODC planning officers and the greatest legal minds in the country that neither of those claims are true, but have insisted on pressing with fruitless attempts to spike the Local Plan - spending a small fortune in residents' money in the process - and offering no alternative.

The draft Local Plan is the culmination of years of technical work and thoughtful, passionate debate (including, at times, fierce argument) under the previous Conservative administration. But if and when the Local Plan is adopted by SODC in the next weeks, there won't be a sense of triumph in the Conservative group: we won't celebrate the need to build thousands of houses in our beautiful rural district; nor the liberal waste of time and money on the part of the Lib Dems and Greens. But we shall feel a sense of relief that South Oxfordshire is on track to provide the homes that local families need; we shall commit ourselves to push for the infrastructure that will make new communities work; and we shall continue to lobby government for planning strategies that protect districts like this, and for building regulations that preserve our natural environment."

Cllr Caroline Newton, South Oxfordshire District Council

The decision to adopt the plan is subject to Scrutiny, Chaired by Ian, on Monday the 7th, then Cabinet on Tuesday 8th and Full Council on Thursday 10th December for adoption or otherwise.

It is regrettable that the Secretary of State has had to direct that we as a Council must adopt the Plan by the end of this year as the Administration was unable to provide him with any viable alternative, but it does mean that that we have as much control of development in the Ward as we might expect at this stage and that our Neighbourhood Plans have as much weight as might be afforded them at their various stages.

Planning Decisions

From our previous reports you will be aware that under the Covid-19 Emergency Powers, the Administration had suspended the Automatic referral of Planning Applications to Planning Committee if Parish Councils disagreed with the Planning Officer differed. This was subject to review after 6 months and at Full Council, the Administration has put forward its proposal to extend this provision until the 31st July 2021. This has been put in place as we expected.

Latest update on Car Park Fees

As reported last month, the Cabinet has been looking at car park fees for the SODC owned carparks, as these have not been reviewed for some years. Full details of the Cabinet discussion can be found at:

<http://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=10361>

One of the provisions is for the introduction of charges for the car park in Chinnor High Street, although quite how these will be implemented and enforced remains to be seen. As Chair of Scrutiny, Ian had asked for a report to be brought forward to the Scrutiny Committee for review and whilst it is still proposed that there will be a 2 hour limit for parking, this will not be subject to parking fees.

Councillor Grants

With Covid-19 infection rates continuing to impact life the emergency councillor grants that we have been able to make will continue for a while longer although our pot is getting smaller.

At the outset we decided that we would effectively pool our two Grant pots as this would give us much greater flexibility. To date we have been able to support a number of areas, which include a grant to the Oxfordshire Association for the Blind (£500) to help them with their work with residents in our Ward, the Sharing Life Trust (£2,500), based in Thame, who provide support with a food bank and who can also help out with vouchers for bills like electricity and gas, and a small grant to Towersey Parish Council to help with additional waste due to the dramatic up-turn in walkers during lock-down.

We also now have available the normal Cllr Grants of £5,000 each for local causes. Our Councillor Grant Scheme opened last Friday and will close at noon on Friday 5 February 2021. Each councillor has a budget of £5,000 to award to projects or services that will benefit communities in their ward.

The scheme is open to Parish Councils and other non-profit community organisations.

We're especially keen to fund projects that will contribute to our new corporate plan priorities, to protect and restore our natural world; action on the climate emergency and improved economic and community well-being. The funding is ideal for projects which are relatively low in costs and can complete within a year.

To make an application, firstly have a chat with your ward councillor, and then submit an application via our [website](#).

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/community-support/grants/councillor-community-grants/>

If you have any further queries, please contact the [community enablement team](#).

<mailto:communityenablement@southandvale.gov.uk>

Waste Christmas quiz and additional information on our website

We have a new page on our websites helping people deal with their waste over the Christmas and New Year period – including information on changes to collection days, what to do with extra waste, Christmas trees and some videos on how to reduce waste by reusing and recycling items.

See more at www.southoxon.gov.uk/christmaswaste

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/christmaswaste/>

We also have a Christmas-themed [recycling quiz](#) which tests your knowledge on what to do with festive junk and Christmas leftovers. We can help you deal with all the extra waste at this time of year by helping you to put the right things in the right bin.

<https://survey.southandvale.gov.uk/s/christmasrecyclingbinquiz/>

What should I do if I see a person rough sleeping in our districts?

During office hours, please call the housing needs team on **01235 422 452**. This is a direct line to a Housing Needs Officer. If the person is in immediate danger, call an ambulance or the police on **999**. Don't put yourself in danger or approach someone acting strangely, even to help.

Outside office hours, please report to the non-profit homelessness organisation Streetlink which is funded by the Government. You can report someone rough sleeping via its website www.streetlink.org.uk

<http://www.streetlink.org.uk/>

or by calling **0300 5000 914**. Streetlink is the national scheme for reporting rough sleeping and connects rough sleepers to local support services. Please be aware that these reports will be dealt with next working day. To contact the Out of Hours Officer, please call **01235 422 420**.

What support do residents receive during their time in temporary accommodation?

Some of the residents have complex support needs and we therefore provide a comprehensive support package:

- A Housing Needs Officer assesses residents' support needs and helps them to secure longer term accommodation quickly
- A Temporary Accommodation Officer, who is the point of contact for residents during their stay, attends a sign up with all new residents. The sign up includes a welcome pack with key information on the local area; a contact number if residents need any assistance; emergency household items if necessary, during their stay (bedding, kitchen utensils etc) and referrals to other support agencies including the Community Hub
- A Floating Support Officer visits residents at least weekly to provide practical and emotional support. The support includes helping with benefits, arranging care support, financial assistance and help with moving into longer term accommodation

Christmas Car Parking

People can again park for free on specific days this December in specific South Oxfordshire DC Carparks and are being urged to use this opportunity to support their local shops and cafes in the run up to Christmas.

Each year Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Councils provide free parking days during December to help encourage people to shop locally for their Christmas presents.

Motorists can park in South or Vale of White Horse district council car parks without paying for or displaying a ticket on the following days in December and here are some of the locations:

- Abingdon – Saturdays (5, 12, 19 December)
- Didcot – Mondays (7, 14, 21 December)
- Thame – Saturdays (5, 12, 19 December)
- Wallingford -Thursdays (10, 17, 24 December)

Users will not have to display a ticket on the free days.

Motorists can also continue to park for free each day outside of the charging period and during the standard free periods offered by both councils, but must they display a ticket during this time.

There is much more we could write but six pages is already too much!

We close by wishing everyone a Happy and Corona virus free Christmas and New Year!

Lynn Lloyd and Ian White

South Oxfordshire District Councillors for the Chinnor Ward.