

## **SODC Newsletter – March 2022**

The last two months have been taken up mainly by the Council Budget and relative financial and treasury oversight and then setting the Council Tax which includes not only SODC's element but also the County Council's, the Police and Crime Commissioner's and the Parish Council Precept. We also have to review the fees that the Council charges for its various services which are generally increased in line with the rate of inflation. This piece of work is particularly important as it is designed to ensure that the general Council Tax Payer is not subsidising other areas such as developers' seeking planning permission, etc.

### **Planning**

We continue to work with residents who have concerns regarding Planning Applications, and we are working on responses to appeals. We have also attended a number of Planning Committees to support requests for refusal of permission.

We are working with officers on the response to the Appeal for Non-determination in respect of an application to build on the Crowell Road Site in Chinnor. Permission for that site was previously refused at appeal 2 years ago by Planning Inspector Barton. We must bear in mind that the refusal was made whilst the Administration were undecided as to whether they should support the Local Plan 2034/5 and before Chinnor's NDP had been formally updated, both now in place, but we must also bear in mind that Planning Law is fluid and circumstances can change.

### **5 Year Land Supply**

As previously advised, as Chair of Scrutiny, Ian has requested a full and thorough review into the Council's preparation for Appeals and the approach taken to review the 5 Year Land Supply. This work remains on plan and the report should come to Scrutiny early in the Spring. The findings of the report will help bolster the Council's case at Appeal.

### **Sewage Discharge and Pollution.**

As previously Advised, Ian as Chair of Scrutiny was setting up a Task and Finish Group to see what can be done to help alleviate this issue by the District Council. Since our last report, the Task and Finish Group has had its first meeting and is proceeding with the initial work establishing its Terms of Reference and Deliverables. We will be represented by Cllrs Lynn Lloyd, Sue Cooper, and Jo Robb.

Please note that this initiative will be operating at a high level across the two districts and will not be looking at or taking forward individual cases, although they will be included in the body of evidence.

### **Ukraine situation**

Like everyone, the councils are concerned about the escalating situation in Ukraine and want to support in any way that they can. We've not yet had any calls for help but just as we did with the Afghan crisis we will do everything possible within our gift and available resources to respond quickly when asked for support.

### **Community Hub supports residents with calls and supermarket vouchers - reminder**

We've seen an increase in requests for support from our Community Hub team. For the month of November, we've handled 217 enquires resulting in 11 food parcels and 56 referrals for further support. We've also called 242 residents to offer help and made 163 follow up calls to those who had

received a test and trace payment as a result of needing to self-isolate. A total of £17,500 in supermarket vouchers has also been given to support residents self-isolating.

## **What to do if you're made aware of someone who is homeless - Reminder**

Over the Christmas and New Year period due to the very cold weather SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) opened. This meant that emergency accommodation was made available for everyone who was homeless and/or rough sleeping. This is a situation that we expect to occur again over the next few months.

On that note, if you see or are made aware of someone sleeping rough, please follow this guide about what to do:

[South](#)

## **Landscape review by DEFRA**

DEFRA would like to know what we think about the government's response to the landscapes review. In particular DEFRA want thoughts on the potential legislative changes that are being planned. You can view the consultation [here](#). Our Planning Policy Team will be responding on behalf of the councils - if you have any comments you would like them to consider for the response, please let them know by emailing [planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk) by Friday 18 March.

## **Passed with flying colours**

Our colleagues in the councils' Legal team have once again achieved an excellent outcome in their assessment against the Lexcel standard - the Law Society's quality accreditation for legal practices. To quote their Head of Service, Patrick Arran, the team has "passed with flying colours".

The assessment involved a two-day grilling of senior management and team members, and considered factors like client care, financial management, information management, people management and file and case management. The next full assessment is due 2025, although the service still has an annual inspection each year.

Well done everyone.

## **Office accommodation update**

You may already be aware that we've taken advantage of an opportunity to vacate our offices at Milton Park a little earlier than we had once planned. We've enacted a break clause in our lease, which will save the council significant sums in rent and running costs.

The lease will end this autumn and a project is already underway to identify suitable, cost-effective interim accommodation that will meet our current needs now we've adapted to flexible and remote working and will bridge the gap between leaving Milton Park and moving into permanent offices.

In the meantime, council meetings will still take place at Milton Park, and we will provide more details on the plans in future updates.

Reception is now open to the public for parts of the day to reflect demand and peak periods. It will open between 9.30am and 12.30pm, and 1.30pm until 4pm

## **Reminder - Parking Enforcement**

As Councillors will be aware, the County Council has now taken over enforcement from the Police, effective from the 1st November 2021. We understand that this is now active, although for the first few months, people parking will be given reminders that in future they will receive fines.

As ever, there is much more that we could cover, but we will close here.

Lynn Lloyd and Ian White – South Oxfordshire District Council