

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

**August 2020.**

**Planning**

**New 'temporary' process removing Parish Council Planning Referrals and limiting District Councillor Planning Call-In to Planning Committee**

Last month we wrote about the LibDem Green Alliance's decision to remove the automatic referral of planning applications to Planning Committee and make Member call-In subject to the agreement of both the Chair and Vice Chair of Planning. We informed you that we would be trying to get this decision overturned at the first available Full Council Meeting. At that meeting, a Report was presented to Full Council for 'clarification'; it turns out that the Chair and Vice Chair are not able to make such a decision and so the Administration has changed the decision maker to the Head of Planning. We believe that his is undemocratic and puts the Head of Planning in an invidious position and we opposed it, but it will come as no surprise that this motion was passed by the Administration, although they are to review the position before the next Full Council.

Our Group decided in view of the Administration's Motion, Cllr Ian White would propose and argue our Motion, and that Cllr Jane Murphy would second it. The Motion as proposed is set out here.

*Changes to the Council's Constitution have been made by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) under Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, as documented in the CEO's Decision Notice of the 18 May 2020.*

*These include the removal of the automatic referral of planning applications to the Planning Committee where Parish or Town Councils views are at odds with officer recommendations.*

*This is an unnecessary removal of transparency, an affront to the natural democratic process, is disproportionate and inappropriate. Additionally, a requirement has been introduced that where a Ward Councillor refers an application to the Planning Committee it has to be subject to the agreement of two other Councillors, being the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee. This effectively creates a 'right of Veto' over a fellow Councillor, thus establishing an arbitrary two-tier system of Councillors where one Councillor effectively holds power over another, with no mechanism for appeal. Again, this is undemocratic and inappropriate.*

*For these reasons, this Council instructs that the changes referred to should be rescinded immediately, thereby restoring democratic control.*

For reasons that are not entirely clear to us, the Administration attempted to Amend the Motion to make it an endorsement of their position rather than vote it down, which in hindsight may have been a better option for them. As a result of repeated interruptions and the debate on the Amendment, we 'ran out of time' and the Motion has formally been held over to the next Full Council Meeting.

For your information the proposed change to our Motion is set out at the bottom of this newsletter; The remaining wording from the original motion is in blue; the deleted parts are crossed through and in red and the Administration's proposed additions are in bold.

We know that all of our Parish Councils have already written to the Leader of the Council, Sue Cooper, Cabinet Member Anne-Marie Simpson and Chief Executive Officer, Mark Stone, expressing their concern and that others intend to do so, and we thank you for your support.

### **Local Plan 2034**

The situation on LP2034 is that it continues to progress through the examination stage and the Inspector has been taking verbal submissions via Zoom.

We have received a number of questions from residents as some of those making representations are developers who have been at pains to talk up their own projects and the 'benefits' that these will bring if allowed. We are informed that, whilst the Inspector will consider these submissions, it is highly unlikely that he will focus specifically on them in his report as that would involve too much granularity. For Chinnor, the second iteration of the Neighbourhood Plan now just waits for the Referendum and as previously advised, in view of the Statutory delay, is considered to have 'great weight.'

### **Crowmarsh Neighbourhood Plan**

The Crowmarsh Neighbourhood Plan is currently undergoing its pre-submission consultation, which closes on 21 August. The documents are available to view on the website

<https://crowmarshgifford.org.uk/2020/03/27/local-community-plan/>

### **Latest update on Civil Parking Enforcement**

We have been involved in ongoing discussions regarding Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) in Oxfordshire – this is where local authorities would take over control of enforcing on-street parking rules, a responsibility that currently lies with Thames Valley Police in our area.

A working group of Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and Cherwell district councils agreed to investigate jointly the feasibility of bringing in CPE to the districts.

A feasibility study was carried out by RTA Associates who are experienced in this subject. County council officers are currently seeking feedback from Department of Transport before looking at preparing any detailed programme for the introduction of CPE locally.

The county council and each of the districts would then need to seek Cabinet approval to then make an application to the government based on the recommendations of the final report. The councils are all aiming to seek the relevant approvals by October 2020.

Assuming the proposal is approved by all authorities, CPE could be brought into effect in our area by November 2021.

### **Changes to shielding**

A reminder that from tomorrow shielding is “paused” and the [guidelines for those shielding will change](#). The government today announced that this will still go ahead despite tightening some other restrictions.

For some this is long awaited and there will be a chance to return to “normal” however for others this change brings with it, uncertainty and anxiety.

We are therefore reminding residents that if they still need help to contact our Community Hub.

The hours have changed due to demand, so it’s no longer open over the weekends and after today will reflect are standard office hours Monday to Thursday 8.30-5pm and Fridays 8.30-4.30pm– this is a slight change to the hours we provided on Tuesday.

The community hub contact details are 01235 422600 and [communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk).

### **Virtual meetings**

We are currently working on providing a system that will allow the general public, town and parish councils and other external organisations to contribute directly to our virtual committee meetings, and this has now been tested and is being rolled out. So far, it has worked well, although there have been a few minor glitches and we ask people to bear with us if they do arise.

### **Waste and Recycling - Reminder**

Collections for our Ward continue to be maintained at a near normal level of service during the CoVID\_19 crisis and now this is easing we do not expect to see any significant disruption. The variable heat-waves we are experiencing at the moment do mean that crews are setting out earlier from time to time and we advise that waste bins are put out for 6:00AM on the day of collection when this happens. Details are posted on the SODC web site and twitter, but the safest thing we find is to put them out the night before where possible.

We have had a number of questions about the disposal of PPE equipment and masks now that it is a mandatory requirement that they be worn in some places. These should be put in your grey bins and we suggest that you put them in plastic bags before hand. The waste in the Grey Bins is taken to the Energy Reclamation Centre, (a fancy name for an incinerator that captures the heat and uses it to generate electricity,) so these items and any contamination is properly destroyed.

## **The new Corporate Plan**

We launched our public and internal engagements on the themes for the new Corporate Plans.

Cabinet has written some draft themes for their respective Plans to help to identify what they'd like us to achieve over the next few years.

We now want to know what members of the public and partner organisations think of these ideas and what you think are the most important areas for us to focus on.

It's important that we hear from as many people as possible, so please do provide your comments, and encourage residents and businesses to have their say via our survey - this will run until Thursday 13 August.

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

## **Every household must check their details**

From 3 August we will begin sending yellow letters to every home in our district. The 'Canvass Communication Form' requires residents to check and confirm the details of everyone over the age of 16 that lives in their property.

This is something we need to do each year by law in order to ensure the electoral register is up to date.

In previous years everyone received the same letter and had to respond accordingly, however this year the process has changed slightly as there are different letters depending on individual circumstances.

In some cases – following a data-matching exercise with DWP – we're aware that there has been a change to the registered electors living in a property. These properties will receive a different letter from the one we will send to the majority of properties whose occupants have remained the same since the last election.

The letters explain exactly what the resident needs to do - it is very important that people read it carefully. Please encourage your ward residents to do so. For the vast majority of residents, if the details on the letter are correct, then they won't be required to do anything.

The general message to all local residents is: When you receive your letter, if you need to make a change to your registration information, please respond as soon as possible by visiting [housholdresponse.com/southandvale](https://housholdresponse.com/southandvale) – you will need the two-part code on the yellow letter to do this. Doing this will make sure the process runs smoothly and there will be no need for additional contact, which is particularly important at the moment.

## **Support available for those struggling to pay their council tax**

People in South Oxfordshire who have outstanding payments on their council tax bill and are struggling to pay are being urged to contact their district council to find out what support may be available. An extra £150 of discount is now available to certain residents.

South Oxfordshire District Council is very aware that many people have new or increased financial worries following the Coronavirus pandemic and there are a number of ways they can help people struggling to pay.

Anyone who is worried about being able to afford their council tax should get in touch with the councils to find out about the help that's available to best support them. This can include:

- rescheduling council tax instalments so that they start later or are spread over a longer time;
- applying for council tax support - the council's council tax reduction scheme can help reduce the amount of council tax people have to pay – visit [www.southoxon.gov.uk/ctrs](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/ctrs) for details;
- making payment, setting up a Debit Debit, or changing payment arrangements online via [southoxon.gov.uk/counciltax](http://southoxon.gov.uk/counciltax)

To support those who are self-isolating, and to help avoid unnecessary travel and contact, residents are encouraged to pay online. People can make single payments by credit or debit card when it best suits them.

Alternatively, you can pay by calling the 24/7 automated payment service on 0345 302 2313 (- please choose option 1 and option 1 again. When you call you will need to quote the council tax reference at the top of this letter or as displayed at the top of your council tax bill, so please make sure you have either of these with you.

## **Eating out**

Economic Development have been helping local food businesses to register and sign up to the government's new Eat Out Help Out scheme, which encourages everyone to go out for a meal to support their local restaurant while observing the proper social distancing guidelines.

Here are a few details on how the Eat Out to Help Out Scheme works at a participating establishment:

- You can receive a 50 per cent discount on food or non-alcoholic drinks if you're eating in (up to a maximum of £10 discount per diner)
- The offer is available Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday between 3 and 31 August
- The offer is unlimited so you can use it as many times as you like

You do not need a voucher to use this scheme and you can use it at the same time as other offers and discounts. There is no minimum spend. The restaurant applies the discount automatically and claims the money back from the government.

If you put your postcode into a link on this [government site](#) you will be able to find out the restaurants and cafes participating within a 5 mile radius of your address.

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

**Lynn Lloyd and Ian White**

**South Oxfordshire District Councillors for the Chinnor Ward.**

This is the official Amendment to our Motion about the removal of Parish Council Referral Rights. The remaining wording from the original motion is in blue; the deleted parts are crossed through and in red and the Administration's proposed additions are in bold.

### **Amendment to Motion D**

Changes to the Council's Constitution have been made by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) ~~under Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, as documented in the CEO's Decision Notice of the 18 May 2020.~~ **under his emergency powers within the council's constitution, which permit him to take any action considered necessary in an emergency in consultation with Group Leaders. The views of all group leaders were sought by Democratic Services on 15 May 2020 and occurred after the views of the Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning had been informally sought.**

**These changes include the temporary removal of the automatic referral to the Planning Committee of minor planning applications (eg 1-9 new houses) where the officer's recommendation for approval/consent is in direct conflict with the clear and unambiguous views of the parish/town council or parish meeting. However, for all major applications (e.g. 10 houses plus) there has been no change and if there is a Town or Parish Council objection on an application where the officer recommends approval the application continues to go to the planning committee.** ~~to the Planning Committee where Parish or Town Councils views are at odds with officer recommendations. This is an unnecessary removal of transparency, an affront to the natural democratic process, is disproportionate and inappropriate.~~

~~Additionally, a requirement has been introduced that where a Ward Councillor refers an application to the Planning Committee it has to be subject to the agreement of two other Councillors, being the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee. This effectively creates a 'right of Veto' over a fellow Councillor, thus establishing an arbitrary two-tier system of Councillors where one Councillor effectively holds power~~

~~over another, with no mechanism for appeal. Again, this is undemocratic and inappropriate.~~

~~For these reasons, this Council instructs that the changes referred to should be rescinded immediately, thereby restoring democratic control~~ Council notes that these changes were intended to be reviewed after six months, as they were made in recognition of the additional work pressures on officers due to COVID19 and following an unsuccessful request to the Secretary of State for a temporary relaxation of statutory targets and the 5 year land supply requirement to avoid a return to speculative development across the district.

Council confirms that it supports the approach whereby this change is reviewed, as was expressly committed to in the Chief Executive's decision and asks that the views of all Town and Parish Councils are actively sought as part of this review. Council further confirms that it wishes the recommendations from this review to be brought before Council in October 2020.