

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

February 2021.

Latest news on the vaccination programme in Oxfordshire

So far things have been running smoothly at the new vaccination site at the Kassam Stadium. Frontline patient-facing NHS staff are receiving their jabs as planned, ahead of the site beginning to vaccinate members of the public in the government's priority groups from Monday 1st February.

It's important we make sure everyone is aware that vaccinations are only available by invitation. People aged over 75 are currently being invited via the national booking system to make an appointment – nobody should turn up to the stadium without a booking.

Alongside the messages we need to push to encourage people to get the jab, we're also now looking into sharing and promoting messages warning against vaccination complacency... as far as we know at the moment, people who have had one or both parts of the vaccination can still spread the virus to other members of the public, even though they're more protected against contracting the disease themselves.

This means that anybody who has had the vaccination must still adhere to the lockdown rules and all social distancing measures, including wearing masks where required.

We're also working with our colleagues across Oxfordshire to see what we can do to help increase take up of the vaccine among our BAME communities, as there are national concerns that those communities might include groups less likely to get vaccinated.

Locally, as our medical service is provided for surgeries whose main base is in Buckinghamshire, we have asked our Chief Executive, Mark Stone, to contact the Bucks Area Health Authority to ensure that there is good liaison between the two Groups.

Mobile Testing Unit (MTU)

DHSC has given approval for a Mobile Testing Unit (MTU) at

Chinnor Rugby Club, Rectory Pavilion, Kingsey Road, Thame, Oxfordshire OX9 3JL

Below are the confirmed dates, between now and the end of February, for when MTUs are scheduled to be on site;

4th, 5th, 11th, 12th, 18th, 19th, 25th, 26th.

Bookings for this testing site will be managed in line with current [DHSC guidance](#). This is designed to support your community through access to the continued expansion of the [coronavirus testing programme](#).

If you have any questions relating to the testing process or receive any media enquiries relating to testing sites then please see the relevant [DHSC information](#).

Planning

Local Plan 2034

You will have seen in the press that the Local Plan is being challenged in the High Court by a local company.

“We can confirm we’ve received a challenge by Bioabundance to the Council’s decision to adopt the Local Plan 2035. We will be responding accordingly but we can’t comment further at this stage as this is a legal matter.”

Planning Decision

Lynn together with Cllr Archer and Andrew Walker from the CPRR successfully achieved refusal for the request by Taylor Wimpey to build a low acoustic fence along the railway line at Old Kiln Lakes. The new procedure at Planning Committee meant that Ian was able to ask questions for clarification of the presenters and the officers and participate in the debate.

We have no doubt that Taylor Wimpey will appeal the outcome and we know that the Parish Council and CPRR will work with us to defend the decision.

Councillor Grants

With Covid-19 infection rates continuing to impact life the emergency councillor grants that we have been able to make. We have now used up our combined allocation of £4,000. We have given £3,237.04 to Sharing Life Trust £400.00 to Oxfordshire Asscn For The Blind to help them support those in Chinnor who need their assistance, and £362.96 to Towersey to help with an extra bin to deal with lock-down walkers litter. As this is taxpayers’ money, we regard this as donations on behalf of the communities in our Ward.

We have been especially keen to fund projects that will contribute to protect and restore our natural world; action on the climate emergency and improved economic and community well-being.

We have received Grants for three projects. The first being £5,000 towards the provision of charging points in the carpark of the Chinnor Community Pavilion

which shows Chinnor Parish Council planning to deliver the proposals in its Green Plan, setting a fantastic example for the Towns and Parishes in the District!

The second grant will help towards out-door gym equipment in one of Chinnor's playing fields and the third is to help the Tennis Club with some equipment for their playing area.

Winter Support Grant Scheme

There has already been a lot of demand for the new Winter Support Grant Scheme that we launched in January.

Citizens Advice has reported lots of people already getting in touch, and we have received a lot of enquiries ourselves, which we're forwarding onto the advice centres. Please note that we have some updated phone numbers for the centres for you to use when you're forwarding people on to these services – see below.

As a quick reminder, this grant is available for any families or households across the districts who need help to buy food and/or heat their homes this winter. Residents can contact their local accredited Advice Centre (see details below) to discuss their needs. The centre can arrange payments that could be a combination of supermarket vouchers, top up fuel vouchers (for those with prepayment meters) or direct payment of fuel bills.

The contact details are:

South Oxfordshire – contact Citizens Advice on 0808 278 7907

Help businesses keep their finger on the pulse

The first businesses to find out about the first-come first-served Additional Restrictions Grant were those that are signed up to the South and Vale Business Support newsletter.

Nearly 700 more businesses have recently signed up to the newsletter following a promotional campaign. If businesses in your ward aren't signed up, they're hearing news about support schemes later than the 2,153 businesses that are already on the mailing list.

Encourage them to sign up at our business support website: www.svbs.co.uk

Garden Waste

As you know, we had to delay the restart of our garden waste collection service after the usual Christmas break. This was as a result of some staff sickness due to Covid-19 and others having to self-isolate.

Having reviewed the staffing levels with Biffa we are unfortunately not able to restart the service next week and are currently unable to predict accurately when it will resume. This is due to further Covid-19 staff shortages.

These staffing shortages also mean that we're not able to take on new customers for the time being.

Residents, who pay for this service, have been raising questions about the financial implications of this ongoing issue and we are raising them with the Administration.

Section 106 – new applications suspended

As you will already know to help manage the many, varied financial support packages that we are administering on behalf of the government to support our businesses during this difficult time, we've had to divert some resource away from the S106 team. This means our Section 106 team is not able to accept new applications for developer funds for the time being, whilst they work alongside economic development to support businesses.

Where possible the team will be continuing to process any claims currently under consideration and will allow new applications if the developer funding is due to expire within the next 12 months.

Council tax reminders

We are very aware that many people living in our district have new or increased financial worries because they've lost work or income due to the Coronavirus pandemic. For some this may mean that they are struggling to keep up with their council tax payments.

The government has not suspended council tax during the pandemic, so it still needs to be paid. We will therefore be writing once again to those people who have missed all, or part of, a recent payment to remind them of the support and options available to them and importantly to urge them to contact our council tax team as soon as possible to discuss their situation and agree a way forward.

You can see the full details of the help that's available and what we are saying to people on the attached notice. But above all, if people have any concerns or questions, they should contact our council tax team as soon as possible via sodc.counciltax@secure.capita.co.uk or 0345 302 2313.

For more information, please visit southoxon.gov.uk/council-tax.

Community hub support

As you might expect, the Community Hub continues to be very busy during lockdown and has seen an increase in the number of people calling for help, with many calling after being diagnosed with COVID-19.

As it was during previous lockdowns, requests for help with food and medication remains the most common reason people need help from us, but the hub is also getting calls from people who need mental health support.

Here's a quick snapshot of the numbers that came in during one week running up to 22 January, but please remember that the Hub covers both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Districts:

6 needed help with food

3 with medication

2 needed financial assistance

2 needed mental health support

20 needed general advice and had queries on the government's online system for clinically extremely vulnerable people to register for help.

There is much more we could write but this is enough for now!

Lynn Lloyd and Ian White

South Oxfordshire District Councillors for the Chinnor Ward.