



District Councillors Update

Councillors: Ali Gordon-Creed
Ed Sadler
Ward: Chinnor
Date: 15 MAY 2023
Period: April/May 2023

Dear Parish Councillors

We would like to introduce ourselves as your new District Councillors. The both of us are immersed in all the mandatory trainings and inductions we are required to do, so please bear with us while we find our feet. We will both come and introduce ourselves on the 1st and look forward to meeting you.

Below is a summary of the current issues that the Council is dealing with useful hyperlinks.

We would like to thank all residents who exercised their democratic right in a historic election which saw the requirement to show photo ID. The effect of this new government requirement on voter behaviour is yet to be determined, but the turnout was significantly higher than averages for previous local elections (37% for the district).

1. SODC election updates

The political makeup of SODC is as follows:

- 21 Liberal Democrats Councillors
- 8 Green Councillors
- 3 Henley Residents Group Councillors
- 3 Labour Councillors
- 1 Conservative Councillor

The new collaboration of Lib-Dems and Greens has culminated in a renewal of our partnership agreement, which sets out our joint strategy for the next four years.

If agreed, the partnership would see **2 out of the 8 cabinet positions** going once again to the Green group, meaning that the executive of the council will be shared between the two parties.

To read more about Local Election results please visit: <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/local-democracy-and-elections/elections-and-voting/current-and-upcoming-elections/local-elections-thursday-4-may-2023/>

2. The Term Ahead

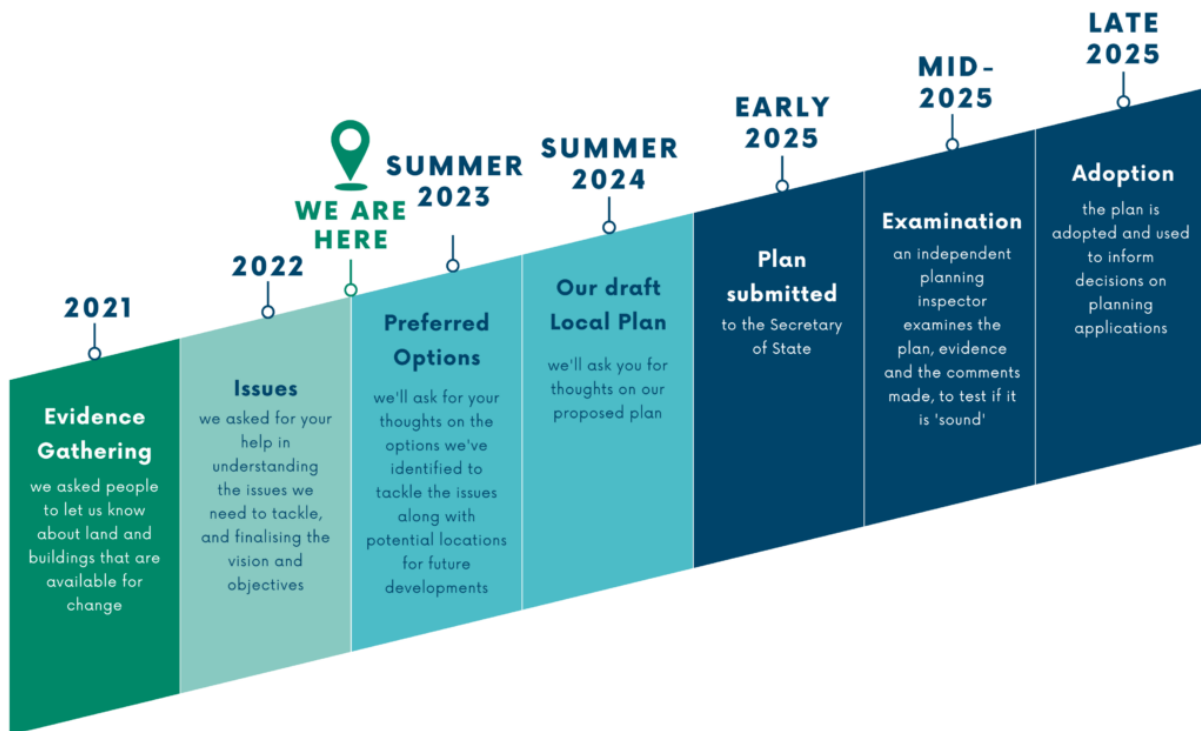
- **The first was SODC finances:** The previous administration reduced the deficit of **£3.2m** to just under £700k. Over the next term, looking after council finances is to continue being a priority. Agreeing to develop a Joint Local Plan with the Vale of White Horse District council will also save the council circa £1m, as will progressing the plan for getting out of the expensive rent arrangements for the council offices. To see more about the most recent budget please visit:



<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/about-the-council/council-finances/>

- **The Local Plan 2035.** We are now in the process of developing a **Joint Local Plan 2041** with the Vale of White Horse District Council which will contain planning policies that help address the climate emergency, restore nature, and meet the needs of our residents, such as delivering genuinely affordable low-carbon homes with the right infrastructure to go with it. To read more about the priorities and steps to developing the Joint local plan please visit: <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/planning-and-development/local-plan-and-planning-policies/local-plan-2041/>

The timetable is as follows:



- **The Covid pandemic** Though Covid was undeniably traumatic for our communities and businesses, and the impacts are very much still felt as we try to recover, some important learnings have taken place which will help us to ensure our communities and services are more resilient in the future. As a result of covid, the 'system approaches' or 'place-based approach' to delivering services has gathered momentum. There is now a new service to support the most vulnerable residents, known as the 'Community Hub' <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/cost->



[of-living-crisis-advice-and-support/support-for-individuals-and-families/](#). It seeks to bring all local support in one place and minimise the need to be bounced around the system.

Business Support Service has also expanded its reach as a result of covid grant administration, and has secured a government grant (£1m UK Shared prosperity fund) <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/business-and-economy/advice-for-businesses/>

Active Communities Strategy link to county-wide public health strategies and seeks to help people find ways to stay active and healthy and to that end make the best of our natural environment, and active travel.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/sports-and-activities/active-communities/active-communities-strategy/>

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

- **Infrastructure gap:** In South Oxfordshire we also face an infrastructure gap of £220m, largely due to high rates of housing growth and inadequate infrastructure delivery. It is something I heard a lot on the doorstep and unsurprisingly it is going to continue being a key priority for the new administration. So far, addressing the gap has included the utilisation of developer contributions which was very poor pre-2019 (Community Infrastructure Levy, CIL and section 106). A new CIL charging schedule which, all things being equal, should deliver circa 70% more funding for infrastructure. A new CIL spending strategy, which will ensure funds are promptly spent on community infrastructure that is needed. Through the Local plan making process, we will ensure that we listen to communities and focus on enabling community infrastructure to catch up. The Council is undertaking two studies to support the work on our local plan, namely the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) and the Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy (LFAS). The two studies will help provide updated guidance and evidence of leisure needs in both South and Vale and will be important in helping to determine the capital investment priorities identified in the Joint Local Plan.

Some examples of capital projects budgeted for, or delivered include:

- replacement of the combined heat and power unit at Thame leisure centre, together with improvements to other leisure centres
- flood alleviation in Wheatley
- car parks resurfacing and lighting replacement.
- A new leisure centre at Didcot North East, which will be fully funded by Section 106 receipts.
- A learner pool at Didcot Wave, to be part funded from Section 106 contributions,
- Cornerstone decarbonization, to be partly funded by a grant from the Public Sector Decarbonisation fund,
- Didcot northern community centre decarbonisation and + refurbishment
- A CIL funded grant scheme double the current capital grant scheme
- River-bank enhancement (accessible boating)
- Wallingford riverside splash pad and changing rooms improvements
- More EV charging points across the district
- Changing Places facilities in Thame and Wallingford



- A CCTV camera upgrade in Didcot and Henley

- **Climate Emergency Nature Recovery** have formed a key priority from the very start of the 2019 administration and will continue to be so. We have established a Climate and Ecological Emergency Advisory Committee (CEEAC) which seeks to advise cabinet on the actions needed to help us meet our climate emergency targets:
 - to become carbon neutral within our own operations by 2025
 - for South Oxfordshire to be a carbon neutral district by 2030

To meet these targets the council has developed and adopted a Climate Action Plan which can be found here:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/02/South-Climate-Action-plan-2022-2024.pdf>

We report on progress against targets and the latest reports can be found here:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/tackling-the-climate-emergency/read-our-latest-reports/>

We have made strides towards decarbonising our own buildings, but a plethora of challenges remain, one key such being lack of funding available for bringing our relatively old stock of buildings up to scratch. In terms of our own operations, our waste collection contract also poses challenges, due to the nature of our rural district and the limitations in terms of using electric bin lorries in this context. Nonetheless, I hope the new administration will be ambitious and innovative bringing us closer to our targets. Residents have a huge part to play in helping us meet climate emergency targets. See 'What you can do pages' which will continue to develop:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/tackling-the-climate-emergency/what-can-you-do/>

Residents can also help by taking part in discussions by engaging with the council. Responding to consultations and participating in public meetings of CEEAC for example can ensure the council is encouraged and held to account:

<http://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=391>

3. Council Performance Management Framework

One of the key priorities for the council is to be more open and transparent. To this end the council now publishes performance reports and data about the responsibilities, projects, and programmes.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/data-hub/council-performance-and-data/>



Our newish Data Hub provides a lot of information about the council, decisions and performance which can be found here: <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/data-hub/>

Though last term was largely about crisis management and improving the culture, policy and practice within the council, this term will hopefully be about delivering more tangible results that will be positively felt by our communities. I hope you as parish councillors and local residents will join us on this journey. I look forward to working with you in the coming months and years!

Sincerely,

Cllr Ali Gordon-Creed

Cllr Ed Sadler