

# **District Councillors Report**

## **Chinnor Ward - Aug 2023**

**CLlr Ali Gordon-Creed**

**CLlr Ed Sadler**

### **Dear Councillors**

We were told that August would be a quieter month in terms of being a District Councillor, but our experience has proved otherwise.

### **HIF1 Update: (Housing and Infrastructure Fund)**

[Didcot and surrounding area infrastructure improvements | Oxfordshire County Council](#). We were requested to attend an Extraordinary Council Meeting in Didcot (29 AUG 2023) to debate the failed application by OCC for a relief road connecting the A34 Milton Interchange with Didcot and surrounding villages, which failed to win approval by the elected representatives due to its relationship to sustainability and active travel. The result of the meeting and debate was a draft amendment, in which the Lib Dem/Green partnership of SODC worked to bring the standard more in line with our sustainable and active travel policies. The primary appeal is due to take place around the 05 DEC 2023.

### **Food trucks**

You will I'm sure have been aware of the issue over the licencing of the food trucks run by Oak Taverns; We met with Simon Collinson, one of the CEO's at Oak Taverns, to offer our support. The Oak Taverns group and the licensing team are working to towards resolving the issue as quickly and expediently as possible.

### **New application for a new SODC Office Building in Didcot**

South Oxfordshire District Council has submitted a planning application for new offices, and the plans are available to view online. [Planning Application P23/S2621/FUL \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](#) There have been many questions about the proposed development over various Facebook pages and in local news sources, so I thought it might be helpful to address some of these:

***Why a new office?*** The old office burnt down in 2015. Faced with the fallout, the then Administration moved the council into rented offices in Milton Park at nearly £100k/year. The subsequent Administration activated the break clause in the lease and moved the council to their current location at Abbey House in Abingdon, where they share the costs and premises with Vale Council. This has always been a temporary measure.

***Why not stay at Abbey House?*** The building is not fit for purpose and would need a fortune spent on renovation if SODC were to stay there permanently. In its current layout, the building is unable to host council meetings.

**Why Didcot?** The proposed site is already owned by SODC and is accessible from the railway station. There will be a small car park for visitors and those with disabilities but (in a rare act of forward planning) the government funded a multi-storey car park at the station with 385 spaces, which is currently under used because of the car parks currently on the Gateway site.

**Doesn't everyone work from home now?** Many people still need to be in the office, others come in for team activities – the proposed council office is significantly smaller than the old one at Crowmarsh. The ground floor will have public space, a square, a café, meeting spaces, and accommodate the public-facing areas of the council. Above will be the more private offices, and above that commercial office space to generate income for the council, which will save money for the council in the longer term.

**Is it a “gamble with public money”?** The plans have been carefully assessed by finance officers and will be continually checked as the project progresses. Opponents often quote the outline cost but omit the insurance money (about £6m), which can only be used for this purpose, as well as any income gained from the old Crowmarsh site, the saving in rent and energy costs (about £1m p/a), and the income to be generated from renting out part of the building. Regeneration of this site into the SODC council offices will be a much-needed boost for Didcot and a much called for plan to redevelop a part of Didcot that has become a local embarrassment, because it is the place passengers see upon arrival at Didcot by train. The alternative is to leave the site derelict or sell it to a developer for yet more housing.

#### **Councillor Community Grants Funding 2023/2024**

By way of reminder - You can find out more about the Councillor Community Grant scheme on our website [Councillor Community Grant Scheme 2023/24 - South Oxfordshire District Council](https://southoxon.gov.uk) ([southoxon.gov.uk](https://southoxon.gov.uk)) or by contacting the Community Enablement team at [grants@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:grants@southandvale.gov.uk)

#### **Have Your Say on our Landscapes and What's Changing Them**

A new study has launched to better understand, protect and enhance the unique landscapes across South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are preparing a new Landscape Character Assessment and are calling for residents, businesses and visitors to share what they love about local landscapes and what they think is changing them. The study is being carried out by environmental consultancy Land Use Consultants (LUC) on behalf of the two councils.

Through a new interactive map, the public can add comments on different landscapes and places they value. This feedback will help LUC understand the local landscapes and what should be done to maintain them.

The Landscape Character Assessment will help ensure that future change respects and enhances local character and distinctiveness. The ultimate aim is to inform the councils' work towards the Joint Local Plan, shape future policies and help guide planning application decisions for the districts.

The Consultation Hub is open for comments until 29 SEP 2023, which users can leave anonymously. To find out more and have your say, visit the new [Landscape Character Consultation Hub](#)

Kindest Regards

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