**District Councillor Update – 1 December 2021**

**Cllr Jo Robb, Cllr Lorraine Hillier**

**Vouchers for residents struggling**

We’ll be supporting residents struggling to afford household essentials this winter through a new voucher scheme.  
  
The targeted programme uses money from the government’s Household Support Fund. It will help pay for vulnerable households’ food, energy, and water bills and other essential household costs.  
  
The funds are not restricted to people who receive benefits, and a range of factors are taken into consideration when assessing applications. The scheme will open in the next couple of weeks and will end in March 2022. Details on how to apply will be on our website [Household Support Fund - South Oxfordshire District Council (southoxon.gov.uk)](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/coronavirus-community-support/household-support-fund/)

Please let your parishioners know about these vouchers.

**Winter Business Grant**

Over £1.23m million in extra funding is being made available to businesses in South Oxfordshire, affected by the Covid-19 restrictions. Local businesses can now apply for a grant of up to £15,000 to help to keep them going through the quieter trading months. The funds could help businesses to become more resilient and will help to create a more sustainable local economy as we recover from the impact on the pandemic.

The funds are available for new businesses or those in the events, travel and tourism sectors, and comes from the government’s Additional Restrictions Grant, which aims to help organisation most affected by the ongoing pandemic.

Applications close on 16 December.  [Winter Support Grants - South & Vale (svbs.co.uk)](https://www.svbs.co.uk/winter-support-grants/)

**SODC Covid Community Hub remains operational**

The SODC Community Hub team has continued to provide practical support and advice for residents struggling at the moment, supplementing the excellent work done more locally in our communities. In the first half of November, for example, the Hub has:

* Handled 166 enquiries from residents - most of which have been regarding finances, food and general advice
* Given out 4 food parcels due to loss of income during self-isolation and financial hardship
* Made 95 calls to residents who were self-isolating.

SODC has also made over 250 payments in the last quarter to those who have lost income due to having to self-isolate and paid out £4.8m to businesses using funds provided by central government.

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| |  | | --- | | **National Tree Week**  National Tree Week, the UK’s largest annual tree celebration, takes place **from Saturday 27 November to Sunday 5 December**. SODC is promoting this event through its social media channels, and will be supporting the OX10 Queens Green Canopy workshop due to take place on Saturday 4th December in Wallingford. The agenda for this event looks very interesting and hopefully Warborough PC will be represented again.  You can find out more about #NationalTreeWeek and the events taking place online and across the country on [**the Tree Council’s website**](https://ebtk.co.uk/click/U0JrbEZhcExKL1p6WjJ1WFVTQWtoc0N6M293aHVoT1doWkZORzZSUDZZSDltcHc0V09uMFNiOUtOZ3lseTQyNWg1cVRmL2xsamNpUjFYRmtEVW5wQ1VJdFlvOXloUGFMemQ0c29PTjZNN2dtTzNJWnNQaXY/UlJ3cUZRPT0), while [**Oxfordshire Treescape Project**](https://ebtk.co.uk/click/U0JrbEZhcExKL1p6WjJ1WFVTQWt6OVd6aFlrenFGNldpSXRjRjYwU3FJYnhtNGMyQU82NFE3UURlaG00eDVXa2g0cVRjdTlva2NpSmtYeGlUVmZwRkV3c2Y4Rnd5UGFReDlWZ3U2dHJLZz09/UlJ3cUZRPT0) have also pulled together lots of information from around the county.  A reminder also that SODC has published its Tree Planting Policy, which Parish Councils may wish to use for its own purposes. This can be found on the SODC website, along with a wide range of information relating to trees and landscape at:  <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/planning-and-development/wildlife-trees-and-landscape/trees/>  **Free Car Parking in Henley to support local businesses at Christmas**  As usual, the SODC car parks across the District will be free on certain days in the run-up to Christmas to encourage shoppers to buy their gifts and festive food from local businesses. In Henley, these days are: Fridays 10, 17 and 24 December.  Please also note the Going Forward Bus operates its service to Henley through Woodcote, Checkendon, Stoke Row, Peppard (Unicorn), Sonning Common and Rotherfield Greys on Thursdays. A great opportunity to get the bus, do some Christmas shopping and enjoy lunch (with a glass of wine perhaps) and then be taken safely home. [Going Forward Buses CIC - Henley Service (H1, H2)](https://www.goingforwardbuses.com/henley-service-h1-h2/)  **Garden Waste Collections**  We are now able to start taking on new customers for the garden waste service. Anyone interested should go to <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/garden-waste/>  **Motorbike Noise along A4074**  The issue of speeding and noise pollution by motorbikes along the A4074 and then along the A4130 past Nuffield was raised at Councillors’ annual meeting with the PCC, Chief Constable and Area Commander on 22nd November. This is a particular issue for Nuffield but other parishes may be interested to know that there is a meeting arranged with Matthew Barber (PCC) and John Howell MP for 16th December. Surrey County Council is trialling “noise cameras” but there are lots of technical problems with them, not the least of which is that it is only noise from exhausts which is regulated, not engine noise. The other challenge is proving which motorbike has caused the noise nuisance when several are riding together. District Councillors from Benson and Berinsfield are leading the push for more enforcement activity by TVP. | |

**Planning Enforcement**

At its meeting on 2nd December, Cabinet approved an updated **Planning Enforcement Statement**, which sets out the new approach proposed by officers to the triage and handling of complaints to improve efficiency, transparency and communication. The team currently has a huge backlog of complaints to process of some 700 live investigations with 241 matters still unallocated across the two Councils. The backlog grew significantly during the Covid lockdowns as officers were unable to conduct site visits but breaches and reports of breaches continued.

The methodology currently used to assess cases is labour-intensive and does not adequately prioritise the most serious breaches. Once the new statement is approved, clear information will be provided on the SODC website. Councillors have requested that Officers compile an information pack for Town & Parish Councils. The triage approach is used by many other councils, including West Berkshire, as a way of prioritising the most serious cases and ensuring the most egregious planning harm is tackled as quickly as possible.

Enforcement is not a statutory duty and it is worth noting that SODC is in the top 4% of Councils nationally in terms of the volume of planning enforcement action taken. The Council spends more than the national average on planning enforcement and it’s vital that this resource provides value for money and addresses planning breaches in a timely and transparent way.

The Planning Enforcement Statement hasn’t been updated since 2016 and there have been a number of changes to the NPPF since then which also need to be taken into account. The new Enforcement Statement and approach will be subject to quarterly review as part of the Council’s ongoing performance review process and the Statement itself will be reviewed after 12 months.

**Little Sparrows: Latest**

A hearing date has been set for the Council’s challenge to the Inspector’s decision to approve the Little Sparrows development at Sonning Common. The one-hour renewal hearing will be heard on 9 December 2021 but it is not yet known whether the hearing will be remote or in person.

The Council’s grounds of challenge were that:

(1)         The Inspector found that the appeal site had characteristics of the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and he therefore erred in his interpretation of section 85(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and acted irrationally in concluding that ‘would not cause material harm to the landscape character of the AONB, nor would they conflict with the aims of protecting its special qualities’;

(2)          In considering whether need for extra care accommodation could be met elsewhere in the local authority area, the Inspector misinterpreted the Local Plan or failed to have regard to material considerations in failing to take into account that all of the strategic housing sites in the area had to provide specialist housing for elderly people, which includes extra care;

(3)         The Inspector misinterpreted the NPPF test of deliverability as to what can constitute clear evidence and requiring a conclusion that housing will be delivered, rather than there being a realistic prospect of delivery within the five year period.

**Q2 2021/22 Corporate Plan Performance Report**

The Council publishes a quarterly performance report indicating progress made towards achieving the objectives set out in our Corporate Plan. The report for the 2nd Quarter (Jul-Sept) has now been published and can be found on our website at <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/corporateplan>