

SODC Councillor's Monthly Report to Berrick Salome Parish Council, May 2016

Devolution update. SODC and Vale of White Horse have appointed leading advisors PwC to carry out an independent study to find the best structure for local government to serve the area in the future. This is a joint piece of work along with the other Oxfordshire District Councils, and Cotswold and South Northamptonshire District Councils too. PwC will be meeting all our main stakeholders and partners across the county to understand their issues and views. They'll finish this study by the end of June, and we'll consult the public on the options over the summer. Both councils will consider reports before proposals go forward to the government in the autumn. Oxfordshire County Council has also commissioned a separate study. In my view it is very sad that all Councils could not agree on joint funding of a study as significantly more Council Tax Payers money will now be spent on two separate studies.

Delay to phone number change. SODC telephone numbers were originally due to change on 1st May, but there's now been a delay with BT changing over to the system. We'll let you know when a date has been confirmed. Unfortunately, we've already sent some information to residents about the 1 May go-live date so we'll let people know about the delay via our usual communications channels.

Good news for green fingers. There will be an extra large garden waste collection between 23 and 27 May in South Oxfordshire. Garden waste customers can put out an extra bin's worth of garden waste on their collection day. It needs to be next to their brown bin in an open cardboard box or bag (but not a trade bag, as we won't collect them).

Bargain bins. Anyone signing up for our garden waste service in June or July will get ten per cent off their annual fee. Existing customers can get the discount off an additional bin. Visit the South web pages for more information

SODC's successful new recycling services. The latest additions to our recycling service have proved to be a hit with residents. They've put out nearly 60 tonnes of small electrical items and unusable textiles since the services were launched just over six months ago.

Planning Changes. A letter is soon to be sent to Parish Councils and Parish Meetings for comments outlining a proposed change in how applications are dealt with. Currently the vast majority of plans going to the Planning Committee are of a minor nature where the parish disagrees. However in most cases the parish does not turn up to the planning meeting. This is clogging up the system and without a big increase in planning officers together with associated costs the system is unsustainable.

1. All major applications (10 or more properties; commercial space of over 1,000 square metres; or any sites over a hectare in size) would still be referred to the planning committee where the view of the parishes is contrary to the officer's recommendation and cannot be resolved by condition or negotiation.
2. Minor and "other" applications (advertising, change of use...etc.) could only be called in by the ward councillor, chairman of the planning committee or head of planning;

parishes with outstanding concerns could liaise with their ward councillor on these. The ward councillor would not need to agree with the view of the parish, just ensure that there was adequate planning merit in a call in.

3. Members of each Parish Council and Parish Meetings will be offered training in planning matters, to ensure that concerns will hold planning weight due to the parish being better informed in the relevant planning issues.

This could be controversial and I would appreciate receiving your comments as soon as is possible after you have received the letter.

Change to services at Abbey House. From 2 May, we changed the housing service we offer at Abbey House so housing assistants are available on site for general housing queries from 8.30am–12.30pm on Monday and Wednesday mornings, instead of every day. We are focusing officer time on those two days as they are the busiest, and the overall number of visitors to Abbey House has significantly reduced since we moved to Milton Park. Anybody arriving outside of these times can still speak to a housing officer immediately by calling from the phones at reception there - this is the same service as we provide to people arriving at Milton Park without an appointment. There is no change to the service for people in an emergency housing situation, as they already need to speak over the phone to somebody based at Milton Park. Any questions, contact Phil Ealey via the switchboard.

Queen's Birthday Celebrations. Reminders have been sent to Parish Councils as we have not had many applications for funds to assist with celebration events. Applications for funds have to be submitted by June 3rd at the very latest.

Mobile phone Coverage. We have now had responses from the four mobile phone providers which featured in your village survey. There is some hope for the future (2017) and some suggestions for improving the current situation. I would like to hear about the previous information supplied and the contacts between individual residents and their mobile phone providers. We have also received information from one of your residents about how improvements may be made. We need to discuss our tactics from now onwards, possibly at a separate meeting of interested people.

SODC latest grant applications. The latest grant applications we've received for funding towards community projects include new village hall kitchens, better pathways and access to community buildings, and play area refurbishments. We will be deciding these in July. In the meantime, the next round of funding opens on 2 May - so if you know of a group that could do with some help towards a local project, please put them in contact with our grants team on 01235 540525. There's lots of information on our web site.

David Turner
SODC Councillor (Chalgrove Ward)
May 11th 2016