

SODC Councillor's Monthly Report March 2017

A Better Oxfordshire - better for residents

A new proposal for better local government for Oxfordshire was published on Friday 3 March - offering real power and influence to every local community in the county.

The proposal called: 'A new council for a Better Oxfordshire', makes the case for abolishing the existing two-tier structure of six councils - replacing them with one single council for Oxfordshire.

Each councillor will have greater influence over their area and county decisions and, with support from unitary council staff, they will be able to directly address issues in their local area and support residents.

A single council will be responsible for delivering all local services across the county, enabling it to make substantial savings – at least £100 million over five years. Services will be more effectively joined up, with strategic decisions around important issues such as social care and infrastructure having a county-wide approach, whilst important local issues will remain in the control of local people.

The annual savings will help protect and improve services in the long term, and help to keep council tax down. Simpler access to services for residents means we are better able to tackle challenges such as the rising demand for adult social care by joining up services such as housing, social services and public health.

Residents will benefit through clear accountability for decision-making and service provision, with a single body of councillors all acting at both local and strategic levels and giving the electorate in each area one accountable local representative for all local government services. The full proposal is published at www.betteroxfordshire.org

Update on Christmas tree collections

This year we collected about 2,187 Christmas trees from collection points across parishes in both South and Vale. This is in addition to the trees that residents have recycled via their brown bins. All trees go to a site in Wallingford to be composted

Encourage residents to sign up to South and Vale News

Please continue to encourage local residents to sign up to South News and/or Vale News. The newsletters, emailed out every two months, keep residents in touch with the latest council news including planning updates, recycling collections and activities and events

LEADER funding is available for businesses

We still have £1.55 million Oxfordshire LEADER funding available for projects in rural areas of Oxfordshire that will create jobs, grow businesses, bring in tourists and benefit local communities. Grants of £5,000-£35,000 towards capital costs such as building work or equipment are available to farmers, businesses and community organisations. The project must fall within the Oxfordshire LEADER area and fit with one of the four local themes. The themes are growing and selling more local food, vibrant villages, reviving rivers and canals

and unlocking the potential of woodlands. These details and information about suitable projects and how to apply are on the SODC website. Alternatively contact the Oxfordshire Leader Programme Team on 01235 422245.

From local start-up to world leader - South and Vale Business Breakfast

Over 130 businesses signed up for the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' annual Business Breakfast on Tuesday 21 February 2017 at De Vere Oxford Thames Hotel, Henley Road, Sandford on Thames. The free event, this year hosted by South Oxfordshire District Council, included a light breakfast followed by a series of presentations about issues affecting businesses locally plus a question and answer session. Key note speaker was Mathew Hornsby, Sales Director and co-founder of yacht and powerboat specialists Williams Jet Tenders, based in Berinsfield. Mathew shared the story of how Williams Jet Tenders went from a local start-up business to the world's largest jet tender manufacturer building over 700 boats a year. Following the Brexit vote of 2016, Garry Young, Senior Adviser at the Bank of England shared his thoughts on business and economic prospects and what it means for local businesses.

Voluntary and Community Sector Forum

The annual South and Vale Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Forum, supported by the councils, will be held on **15 March 2017** (9am-4.30pm). The Forum aims to bring local community and voluntary groups together so they can share ideas and advice. The event, at Cornerstone Arts Centre, is free to attend and includes two workshops, lunch and a funding information fair, plus time for networking. Please invite community and voluntary groups in your area to come along. For more details about the day's programme and to book a place at the Forum please call 01865 251946. Alternatively, contact Anne Richardson, SODC Corporate Projects Officer on 01235 422109

Budget 2017/2018

The budget was set at a zero increase in Council Tax. However, draws on reserves in the future plus anticipating new homes bonuses not yet earned caused the section 151 officer to draw attention to more savings which will be needed. The budget included scrapping the support to Thames Valley Police which has paid for Police Community Support Officers who have been very successful.

Benefit fraudster ordered to carry out unpaid work

A woman from Didcot has been sentenced to carry out 100 hours unpaid work after pleading guilty to benefit fraud. Kyleigh Fisher, 31, of Castle Walk, Didcot, appeared at Oxford Magistrates' Court on Friday 3 March when she admitted two charges relating to her claims for housing benefit and council tax reduction. Magistrates heard how Ms Fisher had failed to notify South Oxfordshire District Council that her partner had begun work. As a result, between March 2014 and June 2016, she wrongly received more than £13,000 in benefits. As well as being ordered to carry out 100 hours of unpaid work Ms Fisher was also fined £200 and ordered to pay £185 costs.

Over 60s can swim for a whole month for just £5.

People aged 60 and over living in rural areas across southern Oxfordshire can claim a month's swimming sessions for just £5. GO Active Gold is offering vouchers to use at district council leisure centres from 1 April to 31 May. Residents can sign up for the offer by visiting www.getoxfordshireactive.org/go-active-gold or by calling 01235 422240. To claim this offer you must register by Saturday 1 April. The leisure centres where the offer can be used are:

Abbey Sports Centre, Berinsfield

- Didcot Wave
- Faringdon Leisure Centre
- Henley Leisure Centre
- Thame Leisure Centre
- Wantage Leisure Centre
- White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre, Abingdon

Please note – this offer is not available to existing 'Better' members.

Charity and Volunteer Awards-Nominate Volunteers or Groups.

Nominations for this year's OCVA Charity and Volunteer Awards are now open. This prestigious annual event is to celebrate charities, voluntary and community groups as well as not-for-profit enterprise groups and non-statutory groups whose main beneficiaries are in Oxfordshire. Please pass on the word to nominate volunteers or groups and organisations in our districts for an award. The event takes place on 9 May at Oxford Town Hall. The closing date for nominations is 3rd April and you can find all the details on the OCVA website.

Bronze Award for SODC & VoWH Housing and Homelessness Support Services.

Great news! Our housing needs team has picked up a Bronze Award from the National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) as part of their ongoing work in preventing homelessness. This demonstrates again the commitment of both councils and its staff to work together to help prevent people in the most vulnerable households from becoming homeless. The standard for these awards is very high so this is great news and highlights the improvements the team have made to their service. They will deservedly pick up their Bronze Award at the NPSS conference in July.

Orchard Centre Car Park Closure.

As you may be aware, work will soon begin on the £50 million expansion of the Orchard Centre, which will bring new shops, restaurants and landscaped public areas to Didcot. To create space for the construction work, Broadway East and Broadway West car parks will close permanently on **Friday 31 March**. High Street car park closed in February. We've put notices up in the car parks to inform people of the closures and have contacted permit holders directly. Edinburgh Drive car park will remain open and a number of new short stay spaces will be available in the Orchard Centre car park, though we appreciate demand is likely to be high while the work is taking place.

Chalgrove Airfield.

The timetable for the SODC Local Plan:

- SODC will publish the revised Local Plan preferred Options following last summer's consultation in March 2017.
- Pre-submission consultation August 2017.
- Submission to the Planning Inspector Autumn 2017.
- Examination in Public Spring 2018
- Adoption Summer 2018

Key people to influence:

- All SODC Councillors including John Cotton the Leader of the Council.
- Chief Executive of the Oxfordshire Local Economic Partnership (OXLEP) (Mr Nigel Tipple).
- Leader of Oxfordshire County Council (Cllr Ian Hudspeth).
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Key items to stress:

- The Chalgrove Airfield site will not help the City of Oxford 's housing issues as too far away. The homes need to be on Oxford's doorstep where the amenities and social support are sited.
- Traffic chaos for which at least £200M will be needed to by-pass villages on route to Oxford and London. The money the HCA and developers have together will not provide the highways infrastructure and amenities required for 3500 homes.
- Chalgrove Airfield is in a rural area with no railway and is not sustainable.

David Turner
9th March 2017