

SODC Councillor's Monthly Report March 2020

Budget 2020/21. The budget this year was set against a background where the Council was spending £3.3M more per year than it is receiving in revenue. If corrective action is not taken this would increase to £6M per year by the end of the Five-Year Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Clearly this cannot go on as by the end of year six/early year seven all useable reserves will have gone and we would be in a position similar to Northamptonshire County Council where the Government had to step in and take over the running of the Council. Government capping rules currently allow us to only increase a Band D home by £5 which only brings in approximately another £290K. Significant items in the budget are as follows:

All vacancies have been frozen and will not be replaced.

Brown Bin charges increased to £49/year

Emptying of Dog Dirt Bins increased to £3/ bin (note. costs the council £6/ bin and the council was only charging £0.89/ bin.

All savings identified total £2M.

A £500k budget has been created to examine other ways of bringing in revenue including creation of popular amenities, maybe a crematorium which South Oxfordshire does not have, setting up our own housing company to deliver really affordable housing. The latter being very successful in other Shire Districts. We will be contacting a range of Shire District Councils who are generating a lot more income than SODC to get ideas to promote.

Clearly this is not what the new administration with its exciting ideas wanted to inherit but we have to solve the financial crisis which SODC finds itself in. The previous administration until the last couple of years had been reducing Council Tax. Had they have increased council tax by the amount the Government allowed we would not be in this financial position. SODC charges £122 for a band D property compared with the average of the English Shire Districts of £186. SODC is a low spending council so savings are difficult to achieve.

In line with the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency we are creating a £106K budget to fund a one-year work programme as advised by the cross-party Climate Emergency Advisory Committee.

SODC Local Plan. You will recall that on October 9th 2019 the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP the Secretary of State responsible for housing prevented SODC having any discussions about a way forward with its Local Plan. As I write this report, we still have not heard whether Mr Jenrick will fulfil his promise made in Parliament to Layla Moran MP that he would meet personally with us to discuss the position which he has put us in. Time is running out as we are forced into making decisions about the plan by March 5th. This to avoid SODC's planning powers being transferred to Oxfordshire County Council. This assumes following discussions with MHCLG (Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government) that Robert Jenrick lifts his ban on us discussing the Local Plan for one day to pass a motion in a Full SODC Council meeting. We are facing difficult decisions on how to proceed with the Local Plan. The officers' reports outlining choices are on the SODC website under the Cabinet meeting and the Full Council Meeting both scheduled for March 5th.

Footnote. At the Cabinet meeting and subsequent Full Council meeting on March 5th we were left with no choice but to let the existing plan go to the Planning Inspectorate for

examination at the EIP (Examination in Public) where we will argue the case for the changes to the Local Plan that we want to see, namely a reduction in the number of homes, less use of Green Belt and very importantly to us locally the removal of Chalgrove Airfield from the Local Plan.

Fly Tipping. A Reading man was ordered to do 120 hours community service and pay more than £2,000 after South Oxfordshire District Council successfully prosecuted him for fly-tipping charges after building waste was dumped on land near Sonning Common.

Coronavirus advice being given at SODC



Wash hands frequently with soap and water or use a sanitiser gel



Catch coughs and sneezes with **disposable tissues**



Throw away used tissues (then wash hands)



If you don't have a tissue **use your sleeve**



Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands



Avoid close contact with people who are unwell

David Turner
SODC Councillor (Chalgrove Ward)
2nd March 2020
Footnote added 12th March 2020