

District Councillor's Annual Report
Berrick Salome Annual Parish Meeting
(April 2019 / March 2020)

General Comments. A complete change of political control took place following the District Council elections in May 2019. The previous Council immediately prior to the election consisted of 32 Conservatives, 2 Liberal Democrats, 1 Labour and 1 Henley Resident. The current Council consists of 13 Liberal Democrats, 9 Conservatives, 6 Greens, 3 Labour, 3 Henley Residents and 2 Independents. The Liberal Democrats and the Greens who had fought the elections on a common platform formed the administration.

Housing & the Local Plan. The new administration was prepared to ditch the previous Local Plan and replace it with another one with fewer housing numbers and less use of Green Belt land together with removing Chalgrove Airfield from the Local Plan. However, on October 9th 2019 Robert Jenrick MP the Secretary of State responsible for Planning by decree stopped the newly elected administration from discussing the Local Plan in a full Council Meeting and replacing it with another one more in line with the election campaign which they had been elected on. Following a threat in March 2020 to take all Planning Powers from SODC and hand them to Oxfordshire County Council the administration agreed after discussions with the MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government) to continue with the Local Plan through to the Examination in Public, but with a decision for SODC members who had registered to speak on the existing plan to contest the plan at the public enquiry.

Budget. The budget for which I was the Cabinet Member for Finance for 2020/21 was set with a £5.00 (4.5%) increase in Council Tax (the maximum allowed by Government) for a band D property. The budget was set against an inherited situation in which the Council was spending £3M more per year in revenue than it was taking in. The Council had been using its reserves for several years to bridge the gap. This which if not corrected would have resulted in the Council within 6 to 7 years having all its useable reserves exhausted. Clearly this had to be changed and the bullet was bitten to reduce expenditure by £2M, increase some fees and charges and create budgets to look at schemes to increase revenue by investing in various projects to be looked at. The situation had been exasperated by many years of freezing Council Tax and indeed lowering it.

Waste Management & Recycling. SODC is still a top recycling Local Authority in the UK, something we should all be proud of.

Grants. Each SODC Councillor had a total budget of £5000 for local projects in their Ward (Berrick Salome, Brightwell Baldwin, Chalgrove, & Newington) and in the case of Berrick Salome I allocated £1970 towards car park improvements etc.

Coronavirus . The current year 2020 has been dominated by the virus which has disrupted life all over the UK, Europe and the rest of the World. The District Council's offices in Milton Park went into almost total lockdown on March 20th with officers and members working from home in dealing with the mountain of issues which have been well commented on and explained in the media. We do not know as I write this annual report when life will return to normal and I expect and hope that a whole re-think about how we operate as a Nation will take place. This also presents in my opinion a new opportunity to look at environmental issues as we re-build our national economy and how we cooperate with other nations.

It was a privilege and I have enjoyed working as your District Councillor during the last year and in particular the positive and courteous relationship enjoyed in this role with local residents and the Parish Council. I look forward to working with you in the coming year.

David Turner
South Oxfordshire District Councillor (Chalgrove Ward).

9th May 2020

Ps I realise that your Annual Parish Meeting will not take place this year, but I thought you would like to see what I would have reported.