

SODC Councillor's Monthly Report May 2021

Elections - what you need to know before polling day

Following many weeks of preparation, the May 2021 elections are now just two days away. Polls will be open from 7am until 10pm on Thursday 6 May. All the details voters need can be found on our website: southoxon.gov.uk/may2021elections

Here's a quick run through of the key things you may want to know:

Polling Stations locations. Voters who need to cast their ballot in a different building to previous elections will have received notification of this change via their poll card. We have also asked parish clerks and the old venues to display signage to direct people to the new building. In the days before the election, we will be reminding people via social media to check their poll card, or to use our postcode search facility, available on our election webpage, to ensure they go to the correct building.

- **At the Polling Station Please note.**
- Socially distanced queuing and queue marshals in some polling stations;
- Perspex screens between you and our staff;
- Staff will wear a face covering;
- Hand sanitisers available at the entrance.

To help keep yourself and others safe at the polling station, you must:

- Wear a face covering (unless you are exempt for medical reasons)
- Bring your own pen or pencil to use when casting your ballot
- Sanitise your hands when entering and leaving the polling station
- Keep a safe distance from other people.

If, due to unforeseen circumstances, someone is unable to make it to the polling station on election day for medical, work or Covid-related reasons that have arisen since the 27 April proxy deadline then they have until 5pm on polling day to apply for an emergency proxy vote. This includes anyone who is required to self-isolate due to Covid-19

Election counts and results. Due to social distancing requirements, attendance at the counts is strictly restricted to staff and representatives who have registered in advance with our Elections team. Covid-safe measures will be in place throughout the three counts and we have emailed specific arrangements to all registered attendees and staff. After polls close at 10pm, the ballot boxes are then taken to the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre ready for verification the following morning.

Here's how and when the votes will be counted:

County council elections. The votes in the County Council election are being counted and declared at four different venues across Oxfordshire on Sunday 9 May. We will begin all County Council counts at 10am. The best way to keep up with these results is via Oxfordshire County Council's website: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

By-elections and Neighbourhood Plan Referendums

We expect to begin counting these votes around 3pm on Friday 7 May. If the verification process takes longer than expected, we reserve the right to postpone some or all of these counts and hold them over until Sunday 9 May. Once they are available, we will post the results on our social media and website

Police and Crime Commissioner election. Monday 10 May.

Grant funding now available for new affordable homes. We've launched a new grant fund for Registered Providers and others to help deliver new affordable homes across our district – one of our main corporate priorities. Affordability, the environment and value for money will be key considerations when we assess the applications. The funding will be allocated in two rounds, with the first open now until 30 June. Round two is planned for the autumn. We've already contacted some Registered Providers directly to let them know about the scheme. All the information can be found on our **South** and **Vale** affordable housing pages. www.southoxon.gov.uk

Census update. It's just over a month since census day 2021 and the initial results look promising with a high national return well above the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) expectations. The ONS is continuing with its field operations into May by chasing those who have not responded in person or reminder letters. Census Support Centres are still open to offer help as well as the freephone telephone service.

Shared Lives Scheme

Oxfordshire County Council has launched their 'Shared Lives Scheme' to highlight an opportunity for residents to become carers by sharing their homes with an individual, who needs additional support to help them develop the skills they need to live independently. Financial support is available, and all carers will go through the county's assessment process, and DBS and reference checks. For more information on the scheme, head to www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sharedlivescarers.

Joint Local Plan. The two District Councils, South Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse, have now agreed to develop a joint Local Plan, which would take the Councils through to about 2040/41 rather than producing new individual plans. There would be significant cost savings from taking this route, in the gathering of evidence, the development of common policies and the inspection process. There is also strong logic in working together on issues such as the development of Didcot, affordable housing and on environmental policies and practices. A joint committee would oversee the process, but the final decision-making would still lie with the individual Councils in order to ensure local accountability. The importance of Neighbourhood Plans is unaffected.

A statement from South Oxfordshire District Council. The Honourable Mrs Justice Lang has refused the oral plea from Bioabundance CIC for permission to proceed with an application for judicial review against the Council's decision to adopt the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035. Mrs Justice Lang also agreed a costs award up to the maximum capped limit of £10,000, which covers the Council's full costs of £8,266. The remainder was awarded to other interested parties. Today's (29th April) judgment supports

the previous decision on the papers by The Honourable Mr Justice Dove on 30th March that also found that the initial application by Bioabundance CIC for judicial review should not progress. Although Bioabundance may seek to take today's High Court judgement to the Court of Appeal, the Council remains confident it worked within the law to produce and adopt its Local Plan 2035. The adopted Local Plan 2035 continues to have full weight in any planning decision made and remains the adopted policy of the Council. The Council will not be commenting further.

Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy. SODC has joined the other 5 Councils in Oxfordshire in adopting a new strategy to provide consistent and extended infrastructure for the charging of electric vehicles, particularly for those who do not have this facility at home, or who are visiting the area as tourists or on business. This is an important step along the way towards decarbonisation of transport, and will hopefully make it easier for people to choose an electric car next time they are buying, knowing that they will be able to charge it when they are out and about. This is of course an immense project and it will take some time for it to be delivered.

Consultation on communications infrastructure. The government is consulting on proposed planning reforms that could help speed up work to lay telecommunications equipment whilst ensuring appropriate environmental protections and safeguards are in place. More details on the SODC website. The Planning Policy team is preparing a response on behalf of the councils and if you would like to add your comments on the proposals, please would you email the **South** team by 16 May. See SODC website.

David Turner
SODC Councillor (Chalgrove Ward)
4th May 2021