

## **SODC Councillor's Monthly Report March 2022**

**Climate Action Plan a major step to reducing council emissions.** South Oxfordshire District Council could take a major step to becoming a carbon neutral organisation on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> March when Cabinet members are asked to approve the council's Climate Action Plan. The Plan outlines how the council will achieve carbon neutrality by 2025 – this means the carbon produced from the council's buildings and services will be balanced by the amount removed from the atmosphere. If adopted, the Plan would signal some important changes for how the council delivers its services, where it makes investments, the policies it adopts and projects it supports. Staff and councillors would receive training to ensure they are aware of the impacts of carbon emissions and the council would adopt a digital by default approach for council meetings to help cut down on vehicle emissions. The Plan also outlines how the council will support local efforts to tackle the climate emergency. Cabinet members will consider the council's Climate Action Plan on Thursday 3 February. The Plan follows significant work from officers and councillors, and feedback from parish councils, local climate action groups and from the council's Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee which met earlier this month. To ensure the council is open about its progress towards the targets, officers will carry out quarterly reviews of the action plan and report to the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and Cabinet.

**Second car park to have EV chargers installed.** Work is due to start in March at a second car park in Wallingford as part of the "Park and Charge Electric Vehicle" charging scheme. The project proposes a total of up to 62 new charging points in car parks across the South Oxfordshire district. Engineers are scheduled to begin installing electric chargers at Goldsmith's Lane car park in Wallingford next week. This will involve several bays being fenced off temporarily and some short-term disruption to the car park. This follows the work at the Cattle Market car park previously announced. We will announce the work at the other car parks shortly. All work is due to be completed by the end of March. This project is part of a county-wide scheme to install hundreds of EV charging points in council-owned car parks.

**South Oxfordshire tree planting drive to start in Wallingford.** A district-wide tree planting drive to help tackle climate change is set to begin next month in Wallingford. South Oxfordshire District Council has just granted an application from Friends of Wallingford and Cholsey Green Spaces to plant trees at Radnor Road and Wilding Road. The applications are the first to be approved following the launch of the council's new tree planting policy, which outlines how it will support local tree planting initiatives as well as how it will protect, plant and manage trees on council land. The Friends will plant approximately 45 trees at Radnor Road, including a community orchard and walnut, sweet chestnut, oak, rowan and hawthorn trees, while a new community orchard on Wilding Road will feature ten apple and plum trees; a hornbeam, oak, field and horse chestnut; and a new hedgerow. Trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere so this work will play an important role in helping to reduce local emissions. District councillors are now urging more groups to come forward with proposals for planting trees on council land across the district – for more information visit [www.southoxon.gov.uk/trees](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/trees)

**Great British Railways Headquarters could be built in Didcot.** South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils will be entering a bid for Didcot to be the home of the new Great British Railways headquarters.

The government competition is asking for local authorities outside of London to enter for the opportunity to have the new Great British Railways headquarters built in their town or city. The chance has been dubbed a ‘once in a generation’ prospect that will transform the way in which the rail sector works, with its main aim to create a better railway for communities across the whole of the UK. The new organisation will serve as a single, accountable public body responsible for running Britain’s railways. Since the erection of a covered station in 1844 as part Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s Great Western Railway, Didcot has served as a vital junction for trade and tourists between Oxford, London and the west country. From a small village, the town has grown and prospered immeasurably over the past two hundred years, thanks to its important railway links.

**Consultations launched on how council raises money from development.** Two consultations have been launched on how funds are raised for facilities and infrastructure in South Oxfordshire to support housing growth in the district. The money raised from developers can be used to fund a wide range of strategic and local infrastructure such as transport schemes, schools, community or health facilities, parks, green spaces and leisure facilities. The first consultation relates to what’s known as the Community Infrastructure Levy or CIL – a local charge that the council can choose to apply to new development in our district. South Oxfordshire District Council is undertaking a review of its CIL Charging Schedule, which is a document setting out the rates it charges for different types of development in different parts of the district. The second consultation relates to the review of our Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (or SPD), which sets out how the council will ensure new development on strategic sites and larger developments will contribute to the provision of affordable housing and supporting infrastructure (either on the site or through a contribution to the Council), through what are known as Section 106 Agreements. The two consultations run for the next five weeks until 11.59pm on Tuesday 22 March 2022. You can view an electronic copy of all the consultation documents on our website at:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/cilchargingschedule>

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/developercontributionsspd>

**The SODC 2022/23 budget.** South Oxfordshire is a proven low-cost operator but has one of the lowest council tax rates in the country for a District Council. This legacy severely restricts the council’s ability to raise additional funds needed to cover costs. For years this has caused an annual deficit – which the council is striving to reduce. This year the council will increase its levy by £5.00 for an average Band D property, so for 2022/23, residents will pay a Band D rate of £136.24 per household for services provided by the District Council. Unlike many other councils, South Oxfordshire does not benefit significantly from the business rates retention scheme, which allows councils to keep a proportion of the rates paid by businesses their area to help pay for local services. The council will benefit from £2 million “New Homes Bonus” in 2022/23 as part of the government’s funding for the year but beyond the current financial year there is no clarity from the government on future funding levels. If funding levels fall then action may be needed to protect vital services. Each Parish and Town Council will be sent information on how this affects their residents when added to the County Council and Police charges. Each household will also get this information.

David Turner, SODC Councillor (Chalgrove Ward)  
February 27<sup>th</sup> 2022