

District Councillor Report – Sam Casey-Rerhaye, October 2021

A new leader for SODC

Cllr Sue Cooper has stepped down as Leader of the Council, after deciding it was to the right time to hand over to someone else. The new leader of the LibDem group is Cllr David Rouane and he was elected to be leader of the whole council at our meeting of 7th October.

Other motions and decisions made at the Council meeting were:

- Questioning the basis and democratic accountability in the OxCam Arc growth policy and asking the Minister to pause it and review whether it is appropriate in the climate emergency
- Objecting to the withdrawal of the £20 pw Universal Credit uplift
- Support for a 'retrofit army' for energy efficiency measures for homes and writing to relevant Ministers to urge a national strategy on this for decarbonisation of homes
- Urgently requesting the Clinical Commissioning Group for hospice beds for South Oxfordshire where there are none
- Welcoming the new Minister for Planning and urging him to scrap the new proposals and the five-year housing land supply requirement of Councils
- Supporting leisure centre refurbishment for decarbonisation and requesting long term, reliable funding from government for this
- New budget envelope for the new Council headquarters building in Didcot
- A grant for social housing to the Henley & District Housing Trust
- A budget envelope for rebuilding Council property on the Broadway in Didcot for council flats and community spaces

Last chance to respond

Consultation on the draft Joint Statement of Community Involvement:
Open from 8th September to 20th October 2021

We are preparing a joint Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) to sit alongside our joint Local Plan with Vale of the White Horse District. The SCI sets out how we will consult on planning applications and planning policy, including the joint Local Plan. **You can find out more information and complete the form here.**

OxCam Arc: The government's 12-week public consultation on the future of the Ox-Cam Arc closes on **Tuesday 12th October** – you can read more and comment **here.**

Covid-19

There are still new Covid cases every week in the District. Please keep on being careful, washing hands regularly and thoroughly, and as the weather gets colder and we are meeting others inside more, wear masks as a precaution and continue using the lateral flow tests.

Garden Waste Collections

The garden waste collection service resumed in October, with a new four-weekly schedule to be implemented as an interim measure while the situation with HGV drivers is kept under review.

An Extraordinary Council Meeting, called by the Conservative Group on 24th September, debated a report on the situation and concluded that the Business Continuity Plan within the Biffa contract had been activated and implemented appropriately.

We accepted that the collection of direct debit payments should have been suspended while the service was also temporarily halted, and the recommendation to extend the subscription period by three months was also approved.

Now we have brought more services in-house from Capita, we can contact residents more quickly and efficiently and the delay in telling residents about this should be a thing of the past.

Planting Trees on Council-owned Land

I am very pleased to tell you we have developed and published a policy and guide for community groups who would like to use District Council land for tree and hedge planting. It is here on our website, and a short application form and a commitment to take care of the new plants will be set out in a document.

This may take some time to process so if you are planning or know of any group who are planning to ask to plant trees this winter, please start looking at this guide asap! [Trees - South Oxfordshire District Council \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk) (scroll down to near bottom of page)

Afghan Refugees

As part of the co-ordinated response to help Afghan refugees settle into a new life in Oxfordshire, the county council and charity Asylum Welcome have published an Amazon wish list for very specific items that they need. That list is being hosted by Asylum Welcome and has now been published and can be found at [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk). Items that are being requested by refugees include various items of clothing and shoes, sanitary products and headphones.

Residents across South and Vale have already been incredibly generous with donations and offers of help for the individuals and families. As the support they need will be ongoing for some time this is a good way to ensure that donations go to those who really need them and quickly.

Move Together – part of our Active Communities strategy

We have a new 'Move Together' team who have been busy since the project launched in July. They have been on walks with residents who haven't left their homes during the pandemic, talking about the support available to help them get active again. Resident feedback has been positive about the beneficial impact of this support. On a related topic, a webinar will be taking place on Tuesday 12th October at 10am for healthcare professionals, social prescribers, partner organisations and anyone working with people whose physical or mental health and wellbeing has been negatively affected by Covid-19.

Please share these details with organisations you feel would be interested.

More info about the webinar [here](#) and to book onto the webinar [here](#)

Retrofit Report from SODC Joint Scrutiny

I chaired a Task and Finish Group for the committee, exploring barriers and opportunities for improving the energy efficiency of homes. It was an extensive, in-depth process where we spoke to industry experts over four separate sessions.

You may have seen quite a lot about insulating homes in the news with the protests by the group Insulate Britain. Whatever you think about their methods, the subject is really important for us in the UK, we really need energy efficiency measures which lead to reduced carbon emissions, and which also lead to improved health and wellbeing, including financial savings to householders.

The report has made recommendations and proposed projects for the councils and its wider partners including the Local Enterprise Partnership. The report was part of the agenda for the recent Climate & Ecological Emergencies Committee and you can read it here, Item 8 on the agenda which starts on page 22: [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee, 27/09/2021 18:00 \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](#)

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