

## **Your District Councillor's Report March 2016**

The thing foremost in our minds is the terrible event at Didcot Power Station. All of us have those hurt or lost and their families in our thoughts and prays at this time. Anything that we can do to help will be done.

This month has seen a number of important events, all of which affect our residents one way or another.

### **Council Tax**

Firstly, when Council met on the 18th February it approved the budget for 2016/2017, which means that, whilst OCC have increased their bill by 3.99% and with a 1.99% rise for the Police and Crime Commissioner, SODC has kept it's element of the Council Tax frozen. This has been achieved without cuts to any of our services, which will be maintained at or above their present standards.

### **Corporate Services Project**

This financial 'win' is due, in no small part, to the pioneering work done by SODC in linking with the Vale of the White Horse in commissioning the original outsourcing of services some years ago. Without the experience gained, it would not have been possible for SODC to come to agreement with the four other councils now to sign up to the new Corporate Services Agreement. For SODC there is a saving of around £1 Million for each year of the new contract. Now that all parties have formally agreed, the work of recruiting the Contract Manager has begun. By now you will have probably heard that our Chief Executive, David Buckle, has decided that this is a good time for him to take retirement. David has worked hard to make SODC the success story it is today, and will be very active in recruiting our new Chief Executive as well before he leaves us.

### **Oxfordshire Vision**

The third announcement is that the five district councils in Oxfordshire - including Oxford City Council - have announced their bid for devolution by the formation of three unitary authorities. This would mean the abolition of Oxfordshire County Council. If agreed, for us this will mean that SODC will merge with the Vale of the White Horse, taking on many responsibilities presently with the County Council and gaining new powers from Westminster. At the same time, we will manage others such as transport planning and waste disposal, through a combined authority formed by the new unitary councils. Crucially, and possibly uniquely in the country, the plan proposes the transfer of adult social care to the NHS. The needs of rural and city communities are very different and the Oxfordshire Vision proposal will ensure that the new councils replacing the existing two tiers with one, are the best match for those needs. This proposal has cross-party support from all of the MPs within our county - including the Prime Minister - and we hope that everyone will join us in supporting this exciting evolution of local government. More information, and news as it developments can be found on our website <http://www.oxfordshire.vision/>

### **Team News**

Our Food and Safety Team won Team of the Year at an independent Employee of the Year Awards in Oxford. The awards are open to organisations from both the public and private sector, so it's a great prize to pick up. In addition to this the council's legal team has passed their annual Lexcel assessment. This is the Law Society's mark for excellence in management and customer care.

### **Planning and Development**

A public inquiry into **89 homes near Ickniel Way** in Chinnor was held at Thame Town Hall. We refused permission for this development as the site is not in our development plan and in our view would be harmful to the local area. It was heard at a public inquiry due to the level of interest in the case and because of the similarities with two other cases which we are challenging in the High Court this May. The council's Officers and witnesses and Chinnor's Parish Council and Neighbourhood Plan Team put up a strong defence of the Council's position. We must now wait for the Inspector's decision later this year.

This year, one of our housing associations, Soha Housing is celebrating the building of its 2,000th home.

### **Didcot Gateway Update**

The Planning Committee unanimously approved outline plans to develop the 'Didcot Gateway' area opposite the station.

This is big news as it means we can move forward with exciting plans to breathe new life into this important area of the town. We'll keep you up to date with progress as it occurs.

### **Rubbish And Waste**

We're holding a focus group with residents to help us improve our waste collection service. It is happening on Wednesday 23 March.

If you know of any residents who might want to take part, ask them to email [haveyoursay@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@southandvale.gov.uk) with a brief note telling us why they want to get involved. Everyone who attends the group will receive £20 to cover travel and any other expenses.

### **Bin stickers**

We've started putting stickers on bins in Abingdon and Didcot to try and address the ongoing problem we're having with recycling being contaminated with food waste and nappies. This is a trial run, and the stickers have our recycling website address on. If people visit the site they'll see a short message explaining why we're doing it. It's worth having a quick read of the message yourself, so you can respond to any questions you get about the stickers - visit [www.morerecycling.co.uk](http://www.morerecycling.co.uk).

### **Grants**

The window for grants is still open, running until 1 April 2016 for decisions by 10 July 2016 and as previously reported, we have made changes to this process to make it easier to apply so we hope that our communities will make full use of this opportunity. The Working Group's first recommendation regarding the Council Tax Reduction Scheme funding has been agreed by the Cabinet, so Town and Parish Council's should soon receive our letter explaining that a Grant is being made available to help support celebrations to mark our Queen's 90th Birthday. Plans for

the remaining funds are still being worked on and we expect to announce these shortly.

### **Forum for community groups**

Our annual event to get local community and voluntary groups together so they can share ideas and advice is coming up soon.

The South and Vale Voluntary and Community Sector Forum will take place on Wednesday 23 March at Cornerstone from 9am to 4.30pm. Please invite community and voluntary groups in your area to come along.

For more details about the day's programme please see [OCVA's forum page](#). If you have any questions about the event please email OCVA or call them on 01865 251946.

### **Air quality consultation**

We want to know what everybody thinks of some ideas that could reduce harmful vehicle emissions in South Oxfordshire, in particular in Wallingford, Watlington and Henley.

We employed some air quality experts to look into the problem, and they've made some suggestions, including a couple of ideas that would make a big difference in Wallingford and Watlington.

You can find out more and comment on what the air quality experts have recommended at

[www.southoxon.gov.uk/lowemissions](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/lowemissions) until 25 March.

### **PCSO report**

We part fund six PCSOs in South Oxfordshire. Between July and December 2015 the work they carried out included:

Providing support for 491 victims of crime, an under age test purchase operation in Wallingford, a drink and drug driving awareness event in Wheatley and a pre-Halloween awareness crime reduction event in Didcot.

For more about what our PCSOs have been up to see the [Q2 and Q3 neighbourhood policing report](#).