**DORCHESTER ON THAMES - DISTRICT COUNCILLOR’S REPORT – AUGUST 2020**

Cllr Robin Bennett, 16th August 2020. Robin.Bennett@southoxon.gov.uk

t. 01865 858680. m. 07979 646815

**South Oxfordshire Local Plan**

As many of you will be aware, last Friday was the final day of the public hearing stage of the examination into the local plan.  As you probably know, controversial Secretary of State Robert Jenrick has directed the council to progress the plan. It was the first local plan examination in the country to take place online, with well over 200 contributions from organisations, public bodies and individuals, and more than 14,000 views on YouTube.

In his initial conclusions on Friday, the inspector Jonathan Bore MRTPI indicated that he was satisfied with the strategy, housing numbers and sites in the plan – although he is going to take another look at Chalgrove this week. This is disappointing for local green belt campaigners, given that 6 of the 7 large ‘strategic sites’ are in the green belt.

We now await final written confirmation of any modifications that may be required to the plan in Mr Bore’s report, likely at the end of this month. Some changes, including some that I proposed during the sessions, have already been accepted, such as on *prioritising* cycling and encouraging community-led housing, but it is clear that the inspector is not likely to make the fundamental changes that many hoped for.

In any event, the government’s proposals for a new planning regime look likely to demolish any remaining local ability to influence housing development plans.

**The issue of litter**

Use of the countryside across the district for recreation during lockdown, which is very welcome, has naturally led to an increase in litter. SODC officers have been working to deal with the increase, including increasing the number of bins and the frequency of emptying.

The council has also started a new social media campaign using Keep Britain Tidy messages urging people to **take their litter home**if they find litter bins already full.

**Textiles and small electrical recycling**

This week we’ve launched a social media campaign to improve our textiles and small electricals recycling service, aimed at stopping people from putting too much out in one go, which fills up the trucks before the rounds are finished. You can watch (and share) the excellent social media video the team has produced via [YouTube](https://youtu.be/6T5biME3JqY).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6T5biME3JqY&feature=youtu.be

**Corporate Plans**

There are just a few days to go until the deadline for the consultation on the council’s new emerging Corporate Plan. We have already had an amazing response to the survey through our staff, councillor and public engagement. If you haven’t already it would be great if you could take a look at the videos and give us some feedback. I’m there introducing theme 1, “housing for everyone”.

 <https://survey.southandvale.gov.uk/s/Southcorporateplanfeedback/>

**Community hub support**

As you know, the national shielding programme is being paused, so our team contacted those on our list. The team managed to call everyone that was happy for us to keep in contact with them through the lockdown and the good news is the majority were happy to leave the home to get any supplies they needed or had made other arrangements with friends, family or community groups/organisations.

Most of our shielded residents have welcomed the relaxation in restrictions and are coping well, which is positive, it’s early days, and our community hub remains open and available during normal office hours.

Our environmental health officers are likely to be part of any localised test-and-trace system, and on standby should that be required in the event of a local outbreak. This would be led by OCC’s Director of Public Health.

**OxLEP gets £8.4 million building fund**

Tackling the climate emergency is a priority for the council and also a theme in the emerging new Corporate Plan. We are pleased to hear that OxLEP has been awarded £8.4 million from the government’s ‘Getting Building Fund’ for investment in green ‘shovel-ready’ infrastructure projects. SODC’s Economic Development team had substantial input into the proposals.

With the funding, OxLEP is planning to reintroduce the Gigabit voucher – a broadband scheme to boost businesses and residents working from home in rural locations across the county. They will also be identifying market towns that could benefit from funding to help fill empty units with small and independent businesses or local hot desking locations.  Both these projects will help to encourage more residents to work from home or to travel to their local town centre to work, helping to reduce long journeys by car.

Other projects to help boost the green economy include the creation of a new skills centre at Abingdon and Witney College to help train young people on low carbon construction and retrofit builds and providing capital funds towards net-zero carbon emission projects/initiatives.

 [https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/news/article/getting-building-fund-help-kick-start-oxfordshire’s-economic-recovery-coronavirus](https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/news/article/getting-building-fund-help-kick-start-oxfordshire%E2%80%99s-economic-recovery-coronavirus)

**Helping to save water**

With exceptionally high temperatures recently and expected in the future, Thames Water is reminding that they can help to save water.  This is particularly important for our region where the demand for water is very high - any measures people can take to reduce the amount of water they use will help to avoid restrictions on use.

We’re helping to share their simple tips on how we can all help to preserve water supplies on our social media, with the following water saving advice:

* Swap sprinklers and hoses for a watering can – leave watering your lawn to the rain
* Turn off your taps whenever you can – a tiny tactic that can add up to a huge help
* Try the 4-minute shower challenge – stay cool and get clean without wasting a drop
* Reuse and recycle paddling pool water by watering the garden