**District Councillor Report- Cllr Robin Bennett, January 2023**

**South Oxfordshire District Council to consider budget proposals on Feb 16th**

SODC Full Council will vote on the cabinet’s budget proposals. These include

* Continued funding for the SODC Community Hub, to support vulnerable residents
* Continued funding for the council’s nature, climate change and energy-efficiency work
* £4.6m towards buying homes for those fleeing conflict. Combined with government funding and £2m from our Housing Strategy, we will be investing a total of £10m in homes owned by the council, the first time the council has owned its own ‘council houses’ since the 1990s.
* Tackling the council’s funding deficit, which stood at several millions per year in 2019, after major efficiency savings, including bringing many outsourced services back ‘in house’ and our inititiative to collect extra business rates to fund local services
* Major investment in energy efficiency in our community buildings like Cornerstone in Didcot
* A £750,000 CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) fund which local orgs will be able to bid for
* Continued support for the Everyone Active fund to support community sports activities

**Review of the Dorchester-on-Thames and Overy Conservation Areas**

SODC have been inviting comments on the Conservation Area Appraisal document for the village, with a consultation which runs until Wednesday 1 March. We’d love to hear from as many local residents as possible, so depending when you get your News, you may still have time to respond! You can email conservationconsults@southandvale.gov.uk

The ‘conservation area’ is a designated area of special architectural or historic interest which exists to protect the features and characteristics that make Dorchester and Overy historic and unique. There’s also a proposed change to the Overy conservation area boundary, to include an area of high archaeological interest in the field to the south.

Property and land in the conservation area is covered by extra planning controls which help to protect the setting and provide a guard against inappropriate work. Trees are also better protected.

Search for Dorchester Conservation Area on the the website ([www.southoxon.gov.uk](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk)), or hard copies are available at **Dorchester Abbey** and **Berinsfield Library**, during opening hours. You will also find printed copies of the survey at these locations.

**Funding for Dorchester recreation ground including accessible play equipment and trim trail**

I’ve provided just over £2,400 towards this from my SODC Councillor Grant, and the SODC community grants panel has just awarded a further £22,500 towards this, meaning that alongside other financial contributions, the project’s now fully funded. Congratulations to Rob Ballantyne for putting together the plans and funding bids, and working closely with the school and parents on gathering ideas.

**Abbey Sports Centre changing rooms to get eco-friendly refurbishment**

Changing rooms for the swimming pool at Abbey Sports Centre in Berinsfield will be refurbished and modernised, with work aiming to complete by April 6th. Environmentally friendly measures such as energy efficient LED lighting will be installed, as well as eco-friendly hand-dryers and new toilet flushes and showers that use less water.

The cost of the work is more than £130,000, which will be project managed by South Oxfordshire District Council. The money will partly come from funds paid by developers which have built homes in the area – known as section 106 funding. As schools regularly use the centre under a joint use agreement, Oxfordshire County Council will also be contributing towards the project costs. Updates on the progress of the work will be provided on the Better UK website.

You may experience some disruption while the work is being carried out and are advised to **come to the centre ready to swim rather than changing on site if at all possible.**

**Berinsfield Garden Village project update**

* Head to [www.southoxon.gov.uk/berinsfield](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/berinsfield) for the latest updates, including our new delivery plan for the project, and where you can also sign up for the email list.
* The first grant payments from the £350,000 Garden Village scheme have been paid to several local organisations, including The Berin Centre, the Day Centre, and Berinsfield Community Associaton. Funds that had been allocated to BIVC, which has sadly closed, are likely to be used to support Citizens Advice services for the local community.
* A team from Oxford Architects are working on a study on plans for a new Community Hub

**Culham Science Village masterplan**

I attended a session on this- reminded planners that the school there will be the new catchment secondary school for our area when built, so needs safe active travel routes and bus access from here.

**Cost of Living** A reminder that the Council has produced a useful guide to help residents struggling with the rising cost of living. <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/cost-of-living-crisis-advice-and-support/>

Contact our Community Hub on: 01235 422 600 or communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk