District Councillor Report- Cllr Robin Bennett, July 2023

**Funding agreed for Citizens’ Advice service in Berinsfield**

In November 2022, Berinsfield Information and Volunteer Centre (BIVC) made the council aware that they were no longer able to continue operating. They were therefore unable to accept the council’s grant award from the Berinsfield Garden Village grant scheme.

This left a significant gap in service provision for the residents of Berinsfield and has had a negative impact on the wellbeing of the residents who relied on these services. It also led to greater demand on the remaining voluntary organisations in the village who are already experiencing unprecedented demand due to the cost-of living crisis. SODC therefore agreed to reopen the scheme to help fill this gap in provision, and Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens’ Advice applied for the funding originally awarded to BIVC, to establish a Citizens Advice Community Hub in partnership with the Berin Centre.

OSVCA submitted an application to request £9,999 per year for 2023-24 and the following three financial years. The funding is to fund core costs for a new service in Berinsfield working in partnership with the Berin Centre. The funding application was reviewed and scored against the grant criteria by SODC Officers and the Independent Panel and the full amount has been awarded.

**River Thames water quality updates**

Anyone planning to use the River Thames at Wallingford and Henley for swimming, boating or fishing this summer will be pleased to know that the environmental charity Thames21 is doing regular water quality sampling as part of its campaign to improve water quality and gain bathing water status in those areas. The charity is publishing its water quality updates on its website. The Thames 21 website has details for Wallingford and for Henley. You can read about the Wallingford campaign, and see the latest testing updates here:

<https://www.thames21.org.uk/improving-rivers/wallingford-bathing-waters-project/>

**Councillor community grants funding now open**

A new round of funding from the Councillor Community Grant scheme is available to help local charities and organisations. Organisations, including Parish Councils, can now apply for grants from £250 up to a maximum of £5,000.

Potential applicants are encouraged to get in touch with me as ward councillor to discuss their project and then to visit the South Oxfordshire Councillor Community Grants webpage for further details on eligibility. Applications are made online and are open until midday on Friday 20 October 2023. For more information, contact the Community Enablement team at grants@southandvale.gov.uk

**Wallingford Castle Meadows wins Green Flag award**

Wallingford Castle Meadows – owned by SODC - has won a Green Flag award, the international quality mark for parks and green spaces. Huge thanks to our friends at Earth Trust, who manage the castle meadows for us. The award is given out by Keep Britain Tidy, setting the standard for good high-quality parks across the United Kingdom and around the world.

**Move Together nominated for an award**

Move Together, the physical activity programme co-ordinated by our Active Communities team that supports people with long term health conditions, has made the final six of the national APSE Awards for Best Health and Wellbeing Initiative. The winner will be determined at an awards ceremony in September.

 <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/sports-and-activities/active-communities/move-together/>

**Cash boost for rural economy across districts**

More than £1m is available to help improve the rural economy across South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

Both district councils have secured funding from the government’s Rural England Prosperity Fund, which can be used to provide a boost to projects such as creating rural business hubs, setting up community energy schemes and diversifying farm businesses beyond agriculture.

 Find out more, and contribute your thoughts via the Expressions of Interest form, here:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/business-and-economy/advice-for-businesses/rural-england-prosperity-fund/>