District Councillor Report- Cllr Robin Bennett, September 2023

**Berinsfield Community Delivery Plan approved**

After consultation with officers and members of the Berinsfield Garden Village Steering Group, a comprehensive delivery plan has been developed which has a focus on a variety of different objectives to enable investment into the built environment, facilities, the people, and organisations within the village.
Officers have worked to identify and allocate funding to the 27 projects in the plan. Each project is aligned to a council corporate priority, and with a named lead organisation. While some are led by SODC, some such as the Neighbourhood Plan are led by the Parish Council, or the Mount Farm strategic site masterplanning is led by Ptarmigan Land/JTP, or indeed the County Council. Some projects, such as allocation of the Garden Village grant scheme funds, have already taken place while many are yet to commence. Progress on the plan will be reported regularly to the Steering Group meetings.

The plan also allows SODC to accept £60,000 in additional public health funding for the work on community wellbeing, and to look for further funds from outside sources such as the Shared Prosperity Fund.

**SODC Cabinet approves new Dorchester and Overy Conservation area boundaries**

At its recent meeting, the SODC cabinet agreed to adopt the Overy Conservation Area boundary, and adopt the joint Dorchester-on-Thames and Overy Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, as amended following public consultation, as a Supplementary Planning Document as part of the Development Plan evidence, making it a material planning consideration.

**Town & Parish Council Planning Forums**

Invitations have been sent to parish councils for two in-person planning training sessions in October (one is in the afternoon of the 10th and one is in the evening of the 17th, but they will cover the same content). These are designed to act a bit like “speed dating” events, with topics to be covered including enforcement, permitted development, neighbourhood planning, conservation and forestry, along with a general update on changes to the planning system.

**Free carbon emissions calculator tool**

SODC can supply parishes with a FREE simple-to-use **carbon emissions calculator tool** (a spreadsheet) designed to help town and parish councils to measure their current carbon emissions. It makes it easy to keep track of the energy used by buildings and vehicles. Once you have this information you can then work out where carbon and cost savings can be made.

The spreadsheet is simple to use:

* You will need copies of your energy bills/statements and vehicle fuel receipts (or mileage records) for the previous financial year.
* You will need to list all sources of carbon emissions under the organisation’s operation (this can include mowing equipment, pool cars, lighting and heating for buildings).
* Once you have input the data your results will be presented as a summary showing where improvements can be made to save energy and money and reduce carbon emissions.

If you are interested in using the carbon emissions calculator please contact climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk.

**Online forum on supporting energy efficiency upgrades to homes**

We are hosting a **free online forum** to help you support residents to reduce their energy use and costs. This will be held online **Tuesday 14 November at 6-7.15pm**. The speakers will talk about the support that is available and some inspiring examples of local projects to help residents. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions.   Again, if anyone from the PC is interested in attending, please contact climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk

**New Air Quality Website**

A new Oxfordshire air quality website has launched providing up air quality guidance and resources for the county.  The [website](http://www.oxonair.uk/) ([www.oxonair.uk](http://www.oxonair.uk)) aims to integrate all relevant air quality-related information from all district councils in Oxfordshire under one single platform.

The website also continues to feature a map and real-time readings of monitoring stations across Oxfordshire including NO2, PM2.5 and PM10, as well as general advice on air quality, why it is important, and how it is monitored across the county.

Across Oxfordshire in 2021, it was estimated that air pollution’s effect on mortality was equivalent to 320 early deaths.

**Supporting Safer Places**

It’s important that we do what we can as a district to make sure our most vulnerable residents feel safe. Our Community Safety team works closely with the police and local businesses to identify organisations and locations that can become **Safe Places.**

**Safe Places** are for people in need of help or somewhere to go where they feel safe, whether they may be frightened, are in need of medical support or just having a bad day. They can be identified by a nationally recognisable logo, which we have shared in the link below and can be downloaded so that the public can see it clearly.

We’re looking for more organisations and businesses in South Oxfordshire that would be happy to sign up to being a Safe Place for our residents. They can find out more at [**www.safeplaces.org.uk**](http://www.safeplaces.org.uk) or by emailing our **Community Safety team**.

**SODC Issues its latest 5-year Housing Land Supply Statement**

The latest statement indicates that SODC has a 4.2 year supply of housing (all 381 pages) can be downloaded from the SODC [website](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/planning-and-development/local-plan-and-planning-policies/our-development-plan/five-year-land-supply/). Clearly this is a concerning, if not unexpected, outcome to this painstaking and time-consuming exercise, but we are confident that we can robustly defend any major speculative planning refusals because our Local Plan is up to date with a strong policy base and our recent record of delivery has been strong. Developer-side delays and market conditions mean that the build-out has been slower than hoped.

Indeed, recent appeals (e.g. one in Chalgrove) have been lost by developers, due to other factors which the inspector felt were more compelling.

We still await Government action on this inefficient and unfair rule, despite the Secretary of State’s comments on scrapping it early in 2023. However, it is clear that Neighbourhood Plans will continue to be extremely important, and the Green Belt is still a very strong protection against unplanned development.