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| **Title** | District Councillors’ Report |
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| **Parish** | Warborough Parish Council |
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**Local Planning Updates**

**Planning Permission Refused!** - We join the Parish Council is warmly welcoming the decision to refuse planning permission to Welbeck Homes for 90 homes on Plough Field. The reasons for refusal were very strong but the developer has the right to appeal within 6 months, so we will remain alert.

**Joint Local Plan** - Many thanks to those who submitted feedback to the recently closed Regulation 18 consultation on the preferred options for the new Joint Local Plan. The consultation events were very successful, and analysis of those attending indicated that over 50% had not engaged with the District Council on such matters previously. This is very satisfying because we were explicitly aiming to reach more “lesser heard” voices and chose venues where unrepresented groups would be more likely to attend (e.g. local cafes). We will take forward these learnings for future consultations, particularly on the new Corporate Plan.

**Benson Relief Road Western Link** – work is progressing well on this project and the contractors remain on target to complete the road section by October. A large new pond has been created for the Flood Alleviation scheme, and this will be a great wildlife habitat once the work is complete. During the construction there will be a road closure of Oxford Road in Benson (past the school) while the junctions are built. There will be a signed diversion, but it’s as well to give as much advance warning as possible! The closure will be over the summer while the school is closed.

**Permitted development rights -** on the 13 February the Government launched a consultation on changes to permitted development rights. The changes include enabling householders to improve and enlarge their homes, ‘building upwards’ rights, the right allowing the demolition of buildings, changes associated with charging electric vehicles and the right to install air source heat pumps.

To find out more and take part, visit the [consultation website here](https://southandvale.us8.list-manage.com/track/click?u=33bec1cf8b5523ad47c7183a0&id=35174fc1ad&e=695539377e). The consultation closes on 9 April 2024.

**2024/25 Council Budget**

At its Full Council meeting on 22nd February, SODC approved its budget for 2024/25, including the outlook for the next four years (the Medium Term Financial Plan). While the later years are highly speculative due to the absence of any long-term financial settlement from the Government, the plans for the next two financial years are robust and balanced. Thanks to careful budgeting and higher interest rates the draw on reserves will be much less than had been expected at this time last year (£1.5m versus £3m), and we have also protected all service areas by making no cuts at all. The £500k allocated to our various grant schemes is also included (on top of the new CIL Grant Fund described below). Given all of the stories in the press these days about Council finances, it is reassuring to be able to report that SODC is in a much stronger position than many and still has some opportunities to invest in our corporate plan priorities.

The government settlement this year assumed that all Councils would impose the maximum increase in Council Tax, so we will be adding £5 to the SODC portion of the Council Tax for a Band D property. This still means that the SODC share of the total collected is just 6%, with some 77% going to OCC and 14% to the PCC. Several parishes and towns in South Oxfordshire now charge a higher precept than the District Council.

**Community** **Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Grant Fund**

South Oxfordshire District Council has just launched a new grant scheme called the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Grant Fund. Town and parish councils and not for profit community groups and organisations will be able to bid for between £75,000 to £250,000 for a wide range of infrastructure to support existing or planned future growth in the district.

The council collects CIL funding from liable developments in order to deliver the infrastructure required to support growth in the district. Through this pilot scheme, we’re helping to fund local organisations to deliver infrastructure for their community required as a direct result of development.

Eligibility: You can find more information about the Grant Fund and view the full eligibility criteria online, a few points to note:

* The fund is available to town and parish councils and not for profit community groups and organisations only.
* Proposed projects need to have a genuine focus on providing the infrastructure needed as a result of development and must be delivered in the South Oxfordshire District Council area.
* Proposed projects must adhere to the CIL spending requirements as set out in the regulations – the fund may only be used to support the actual delivery of physical infrastructure. It can be new infrastructure or improve or expand the reach of existing infrastructure. It is not able to cover costs for scoping or pre-planning of projects.
* We will prioritise projects that support our corporate priorities and other key criteria to ensure deliverability, sustainability, inclusivity and consideration towards the climate and ecological impacts.

**How to apply**:

You can submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) from week commencing 19 February 2024. The EOI stage will be open for six weeks and you can view the guidance materials now to help prepare. We will be in touch again once submissions open. Following the EOI process, applicants whose projects meet the funding requirements will be invited to submit a full application. If you have any questions, please send them to infrastructureobligations@southandvale.gov.uk.

**Elections help**

We’re still looking for people to work in polling stations on Thursday 2 May for the Police and Crime Commissioner Election.  Please help us to spread the word by displaying [the South Oxfordshire poster](https://southandvale.us8.list-manage.com/track/click?u=33bec1cf8b5523ad47c7183a0&id=bc0ab3a36b&e=b961a0238f) in local community buildings and on public noticeboards and by sharing our recruitment messages in local newsletters and on social media.

**New council energy saving leaflets available**

The council’s climate team is promoting advice and financial support available for residents for energy saving measures ranging from draught proofing to solar panels.

This includes direct support from the councils as well as from partners such Better Housing Better Health and from government schemes. There are two versions of a leaflet full of useful information on this topic, one for online use and one to be printed – they are both available here ([South](https://southandvale.us8.list-manage.com/track/click?u=33bec1cf8b5523ad47c7183a0&id=3ba2ad999e&e=b961a0238f)/[Vale](https://southandvale.us8.list-manage.com/track/click?u=33bec1cf8b5523ad47c7183a0&id=9d1f4cce26&e=b961a0238f)). If you would like some copies to distribute within the parish please email climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk

**Dig In! Free Compost Giveaway**

With spring just around the corner, we are holding a compost giveaway in March to help residents to get their gardens flourishing, save money and reduce waste. People can fill up to three bags of high-quality compost per household, but they must bring their own bags and a spade! The offer is only available while supplies last.

The event takes place on **Sunday 17 March** (South Oxfordshire residents only) - 9am -11am in Crowmarsh at the land of the former council office on Benson Lane. Our friendly Waste and Recycling team will also be on hand to share tips composting and answer questions.

**SODC Corporate Plan Performance Report –** [**Third Quarter (Oct-Dec 2023)**](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/02/DRAFT-Q3-Corporate-Plan-Performance-report-South.pdf)

**SODC Climate Action Plan Performance Report –** [**Third Quarter**](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/02/DRAFT-Q3-Climate-Action-Plan-Performance-report-South-1.pdf)