

Title	District Councillor's Report
Author	Cllrs Andrea Powell & Sue Cooper
Parish	Warborough Parish Council
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New Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule now in place

As we move into this year, it's worth looking back on important decisions made towards the end of 2022 that will have a positive impact on the residents of South Oxfordshire, reflecting the priorities we set out when we took over the administration from the Conservatives back in 2019.

We formally adopted a revised **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule**, which came into effect on 3 January (i.e to apply to applications approved after this date). This will increase significantly the amount of CIL developers are required to pay on new development and introduces a levy for developments including student housing, build-to-rent housing and elderly person's accommodation, all of which are currently exempt from charges. This is a really positive development as it will ensure we make progress toward bridging the large community infrastructure gap we have in the district. Examples of community infrastructure include playgrounds, leisure facilities, zebra crossings etc. Parishes with adopted Neighbourhood Plans can also expect their CIL receipts to increase significantly since they are allocated 25% of all CIL contributions.

Housing Delivery Strategy and Action Plan

A new housing strategy has been approved to help residents on lower incomes access safe and secure affordable housing. This will enable the Council to build its own homes for social rent and will also help us to tackle the climate emergency to reduce carbon emissions by encouraging developers to use sustainable materials while building well-designed energy efficient housing. It also aims to encourage housing providers and residents to access grant funding to help retrofit their homes to reduce their carbon footprint. In December a further £2m was allocated to this programme, putting those CIL payments to good use!

Cost of Living Crisis

The Council has produced a useful guide to help residents struggling with the rising cost of living, which is available on the Council's website (www.southoxon.gov.uk). Anyone experiencing hardship should contact our Community Hub where officers can guide residents to the support that's available: 01235 422 600 or communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk.

We opened a third round of the **Household Support Fund** in January to support households who can't afford essentials over the winter months. Support will be tailored to individual needs but will focus on food and fuel vouchers. Details of eligibility will be published on our Cost of Living website pages mentioned above.

Homes for Refugees

SODC's Housing Team has one of the best track records in the country for reducing homelessness (as reported in our Quarterly Performance Management Reports) and is putting its expertise to good use in finding accommodation for refugees as well. Now that many Ukrainian visitors are reaching the end of their initial six-month stays with local families, some are having to find new homes and the Housing Team is working hard on this challenge. We have also been allocated some government towards buying 21 homes for refugee families to reduce the extra demand on our overstretched local social housing. When the refugees move on these will become part of the Council's social housing stock.

There are several benefits to this approach (which we had started to deploy in any case with our own limited funds) because we are able to ensure these homes are energy-efficient and of an appropriate quality as well as benefiting from rental payments and adding to our own eventual housing stock.

In the meantime, monthly payments to hosts of Ukrainian guests have increased to £550 over the winter and we are still keen to hear from anyone willing to provide accommodation to families in need; any enquiries can be directed to the SODC Community Hub – www.southoxon.gov.uk/ukraine

CCTV Success Rates

Our CCTV operators have helped support nearly 100 arrests across the two districts in the past six months. Our most recent CCTV report gives information on how we've contributed to tackling crime and helping safeguard vulnerable people in our town centres. Operators working across Didcot, Henley, Thame and Wallingford supported 363 incidents, gave 47 evidence packs for potential court proceedings and supported 42 arrests.

Coming in 2023 – Voter ID

A new law passed in 2022 requires all those casting votes in local and national elections to show some form of photo identification at the polling station. This law was passed despite there being virtually no evidence of voter fraud in the UK, and the acceptable forms of ID seem designed to make it difficult for younger citizens to cast their vote! This change will affect all voters at the next local elections on **4th May 2023**, so make sure you don't lose your democratic right to vote by ensuring you have an acceptable form of ID or by registering for a postal vote. For more information, including details on how to apply, people should visit <https://electoralcommission.org.uk/voterID> or call the Electoral Commission helpline on 0800 328 0280. SODC has also set up an information page at <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/local-democracy-and-elections/elections-and-voting/new-for-2023-you-will-need-to-show-photo-id-when-voting-at-a-polling-station/>

2023-24 Budget

During February SODC will be setting its budget for the 2023-24 financial year, with detailed discussions taking place at Scrutiny Committee when all councillors were invited to listen to a briefing on the budget (last week), Cabinet (this Thursday) and Full Council (16th February). Just before Christmas we received information (finally) from central government about our funding for the next two years, but we are still flying blind in the longer term, even though we are obliged to produce a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) that covers 5 years.

Although we continue to run an annual deficit, SODC is not in the same dire financial straits as many local councils, which means we are still able to allocate funds for discretionary services and to support our local communities with grants and well-being projects. In fact, the outlook for 2023/24 is considerably better than the one we inherited from the previous administration, thanks to proactive in-sourcing of key services, improved financial reporting, analysis of historical underpayment of business rates, increases in fees and charges and sensible allocation of external funds to cover project costs. At the time of writing the projected deficit for the next financial year is well under £1m, compared to approximately £3m in previous years.

At our last Cabinet meeting of 2022 we agreed to increase car parking charges by inflation in order to ensure that those who do not use these facilities aren't subsidising those who do. Council Tax charges for 2023/24 will also be approved at the Council budget meeting; we expect the SODC element of the charge for a Band D property to increase by £5, the maximum allowed for a District Council and what the government is expecting us to do.

Great British Spring Clean

This year we'll again be supporting the Keep Britain Tidy Great British Spring Clean by loaning litter pickers, high-viz jackets and bags to community litter picking groups and individuals. The event runs from Monday 17 March to Sunday 2 April. Equipment can be booked by completing and returning the booking form and declaration document to waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk. The forms are available on our **South** litter picking pages.

Equipment is limited so to avoid disappointment bookings should be made as soon as possible. Bookings for litter picking equipment can be made at any point during the year, not just during The Great British Spring Clean!

Government Consultation on Planning Reforms

Don't forget that the government is currently consulting on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework; this consultation closes on 2nd March and full details can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-reforms-to-national-planning-policy>

Leisure needs survey

The Council will shortly be undertaking two studies to support the work on our local plan, namely the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) and the Leisure Facilities Assessment and Strategy (LFAS). The two studies will help provide updated guidance and evidence of leisure needs in both South and Vale and will be important in helping to determine the capital investment priorities identified in the Joint Local Plan.

As part of this work, **Stuart Todd Associates** and the **National Governing Bodies** are writing to sports clubs, parish councils and local organisations to find out more about the leisure provision in the districts, so do please respond to them if approached.