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| <b>Title</b>   | District Councillors' Report     |
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| <b>Parish</b>  | Warborough Parish Council        |
| <b>Date</b>    | 1 <sup>st</sup> May 2024         |

## **Help set the 'Way Ahead' for South Oxfordshire**

We are creating a new council strategic plan for the next four years, and we are encouraging everyone within the district to join in the conversation on 'The Way Ahead'.

Delivering new council owned homes and increasing the amount of land protected for nature are just two of the ideas set out as a potential way ahead for the district. We have opened up a four-week discussion around creating a fairer, more inclusive South Oxfordshire where all residents can thrive both now and in the future. We have set out our initial ideas on what direction to take and the aim is now to open up a two-way conversation and find out what residents, businesses, community groups and organisations think. The feedback will contribute to the development of a new draft council plan for 2024-2028.

To find out more and take part, visit: [www.southoxon.gov.uk/TheWayAhead](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/TheWayAhead) This engagement closes on 14<sup>th</sup> May.

## **Police and Crime Commissioner Election**

The Police and Crime Commissioner election takes place on Thursday 2 May. This is our chance to vote on the person whose role it will be to make sure Thames Valley Police is an efficient and effective force. We still need to fill some vacant posts for election staff, so do keep asking around for anyone interested in working for the day in one of the polling stations across the district.

To find out more about the candidates and the election, visit [our PCC election page for South Oxfordshire](#).

## **Empty homes policy**

Our new Empty Homes Policy, approved by Cabinet recently, will help us to bring more empty homes back into use. Our housing team, working proactively with owners of empty homes, will use the support offered through the policy to help homes become reoccupied. The focus will be on making homes available for those that are in most need of housing.

We'll be promoting the policy and the help available to empty homeowners and residents shortly. We'll also be offering residents advice on reporting any empty homes causing issues in their neighbourhoods. So if the Parish Council is aware of any homes which have been empty for a long period for no good reason, do let us know and we can investigate. There are not so many genuinely empty properties in South Oxfordshire, but if this policy enables us to bring just a small number back into use for social rent, then that will make it worthwhile.

## **Recent Cabinet Decisions**

The SODC Cabinet meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> April had a very full agenda following the Easter break. The full reports pack (all 329 pages of it) can be found on the SODC website at

<https://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=121&MId=3192>

Highlights included:

- Adjustments to hackney cab tariffs and adoption of the “Guildford model”. This is designed to strike the right balance between financial viability for cab drivers and protecting the public from unfair charging.
- An update to the Didcot Garden Town delivery plan, including a new Wayfinding strategy and a Green Spaces strategy.
- A new approach to procurement of waste collection and street cleansing vehicles, to facilitate a gradual shift away from diesel vehicles as alternatives become available and the EV charging infrastructure improves.
- An update report on the Housing Delivery Strategy which was first adopted in late 2022. This covers the delivery of new social housing, a housing enforcement policy for privately rented homes and SODC’s new responsibilities as a social landlord.
- Approval for plans for the Didcot Broadway site which will deliver 9 homes for social rent as well as some community space (owned and developed by SODC).

### **SODC Crowmarsh site**

SODC has submitted a temporary planning application to enable the continued use of the Crowmarsh site as a grounds maintenance depot for a limited time. We don’t yet have a new site for the grounds maintenance team to have a base and the results of the Joint Local Plan consultation exercise which included a question of the future use of the Crowmarsh site are still being analysed.

### **More Let it Bee sites**

Following on from the success of our Let It Bee trial last year our parks team is continuing with our land management where we allow the grass grow on sections of land we own or manage. This year we have added new sites to our meadow areas following recommendations from residents, council members and town and parish councils. There is a small new site at the Millstream car park in Benson, for example. For more information please see our grass cutting pages on our websites. At the same time, road and path edges and vision plays will be kept shorter to ensure safety for all users.

### **Update on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

Oxfordshire County Council has organised a free webinar on 8 May to present a summary of responses from local people on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This follows workshops and a survey in February and March. At the webinar you will hear the plans to create biodiversity priorities and to then map the areas for action across the county. Anyone can join so please spread the word.

Sign up here: [Oxfordshire’s Local Nature Recovery Strategy - Progress Summary Tickets, Wed 8 May 2024 at 18:00 |Eventbrite](#) To find out more about the local nature recovery strategy, visit the [county council’s website](#).

### **NEW summer season at the Cornerstone, Didcot**

Explore an exciting array of new shows, classes, exhibitions, and workshops at Cornerstone Arts Centre this summer, now available for booking.

Discover recently added classes like Drawing with Pencil for Beginners or let your toddler's creativity flourish in Splat! Art Play For Tots. All classes commence at the end of April, and free taster sessions are open for booking throughout the term, allowing you to try before you commit.

This season's line up features music, comedy, family entertainment, and theatre, including the highly anticipated return of the Didcot Garden Party. For full details [visit the Cornerstone website.](#)