

SODC Newsletter – August 2022

Planning

We continue to work with residents who have concerns regarding Planning Applications, and the impact on their properties. We have been in dialogue with our Planning Officers in respect of a number of applications where acceptability might be considered marginal in our Parishes, and we continue to work with both Chinnor PC and residents in preparing our case for refusal of the Planning Application for 32 new homes in Oakley Lane. Aside from the additional pressure on the village resources, it will provide even more pressure on the Ward's infrastructure.

5 Year Land Supply

Members may recall that following a decision in respect of an Appeal relative to an application for more homes at Little Sparrows, Sonning Common, in which the Inspector 'reduced' our Land Supply from 5.2 years to just over 4.3 years, Ian, as Chair of Scrutiny requested a review be carried out into the way we calculate our Land Supply. That Review confirmed that, using the Government's approved methodology we did have a 5.2 year Land Supply, but this methodology contained a number of assumptions and it was these that allowed Inspectors to draw out different figures.

We have decided to consult with a world class firm of experts in the field and a new more robust approach has been adopted, albeit that it is a more intensive and time consuming methodology. This does not work on assumptions that are easily challenged, instead relying on figures that are obtained through observation rather than opinion. This methodology is therefore significantly stronger than any other in use at this time. The result is that we have now announced our Land Supply is 5.58 years and ***this figure is evidenced in every respect.***

You can read the Statement here and download the Full Report (warning the document is 200 pages long.)

[**the new five year housing land supply statement on our website**](#)

The Full Report on the Council's approach will be coming to a Scrutiny Meeting in the near future.

Enforcement

Members will recall that at the end of 2021 (November) the Administration introduced a new process for enforcement and that at Scrutiny, Ian as Chair, asked for an interim review to be carried out after 6 months, and this was brought to our Scrutiny Meeting on the 26th of July and we reproduce the section from the draft minutes for your information below:

Planning enforcement update

Cabinet member for planning introduced the report, which provided a 6-month update since implementation of a new planning enforcement triage process that previously came to scrutiny committee. It was a good news story regarding relieving the backlog of cases. Officers were now working towards achieving the response deadlines set in the planning enforcement statement as the backlog had been cleared.

The main discussion points were as follows:

- A member questioned whether the new system was a success for officers and residents alike. Cabinet member explained the new system was the best use of resources and this was beneficial to residents.

- Officer explained that further detail was now added to letters to residents to explain the reasoning behind decisions at various stages, to educate and inform what enforcement was about, and to help residents to understand what counts as evidence and what was required.
- Officer explained that the team was adequately resourced, and the enforcement team were focussing on what was planning harm. The new process showed efficiency improvements that would allow officers to focus on dealing with the most harmful cases.
- Cabinet member responded to member comment that planning enforcement was a discretionary service but was viewed as important by the council.²
- Head of Planning clarified in response to a member's query regarding the graph under paragraph 13. Complex cases were in the system, and some items had to go through due process, court etc, and therefore still in the system. It was not the case that triage was not working to clear those cases.
- A member expressed a view that the new process was encouraging compared to historical process.

The planning enforcement team were congratulated for their progress. Committee noted the report, with Cabinet member taking note of the comments raised. Cabinet member was thanked, and officers were thanked and congratulated on their work so far.

The Full Report can be found in the Scrutiny Committee Pack at:
<http://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MIId=3010&x=1>

Remaining with Enforcement, a man who failed to comply with the requirements of two enforcement notices for an illegal development by the banks of the River Thames at Long Wittenham has been fined £13,000.

Simon Courtney-Worthy, 63 of Oscar's Gardens, Ward's Field, Long Wittenham, was also ordered to pay more than £5,000 in costs towards South Oxfordshire District Council, which brought the prosecution.

The case centred on a change of use and development on land at Ward's Field in Long Wittenham, which was found to be a breach of planning control and has caused harm to a conservation area.

At Oxford Magistrates' Court on 28 July, Courtney-Worthy pleaded guilty of two counts of failing to comply with an Enforcement Notice.

In passing sentence, the District Judge said the culpability was high and the harm great and agreed that Courtney-Worthy had a "cavalier" approach to this matter.

Courtney-Worthy was fined a total of £13,000 for the two counts. The District Judge awarded the council costs of £5,511 and imposed a victim surcharge of £181. Courtney-Worthy was ordered to pay within four months.

Requests for new litter or dog bins

Requests for new litter and dog waste bins have been a hot topic recently, so here's a quick update on how it works.

Dog waste can now be mixed with general litter and so it makes sense to install litter bins rather than ones for dog waste only. When parishes ask us to install new bins, we must consider what need there is for a new bin alongside the ongoing costs of emptying it as well as the initial installation costs.

We will assess the site for evidence of a litter or dog fouling problem and consider if:

- there are existing bins nearby
- there's a high footfall
- it's on an adopted highway or council owned land, or a risk to users or residents living nearby

- it's close to the public highway to allow crews to empty it safely
- If you'd like more information on new litter bins, please contact the Waste team via waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk

Household Support Fund update

Please continue to help spread the message that residents who haven't previously received vouchers or support from the Household Support Fund can still apply.

The scheme is designed to support households who are struggling to afford energy, food and other related household bills and we are keen to reach as many residents as we can.

Details on the voucher scheme and how to apply are on [our website](#).

Covid-19 Additional Relief Fund

Further funding will soon be available to support some businesses impacted by the pandemic with their 2021/2022 business rates. We have £2.85 million in South for businesses which are ineligible for existing support linked to business rates.

We've written to all those who are eligible for this scheme. Unless businesses choose to decline the relief or confirm they are not eligible, we will apply the relief automatically to their business rates account.

Unauthorised encampments - changes to the law

On Tuesday 28 June the law around unauthorised encampments changed. It's now a criminal offence to reside with a vehicle on land without permission. The new offence will be committed when someone aged 18 or over causes significant damage, disruption or distress and are requested to leave or remove their property by the landowner or police.

Taxi driver disqualified and fined after offering rides illegally at Henley Regatta

On Friday 8 July, at Oxford Magistrates Court, Mr Sharafat Anayat, 39, of Woodstock Close, Maidenhead, was found guilty of illegally picking up passengers outside of the district where his vehicle was licensed. He was also found guilty of driving without the required insurance, failing to wear his council issued driver's badge and of obstructing council officers in the course of their duties.

In court, the District Judge heard how on 13 August 2021, licensing officers from South Oxfordshire District Council and neighbouring councils who were working at Henley Regatta had spotted Mr Anayat's vehicle parked on double yellow lines in Thameside, Henley-on-Thames, with its taxi roof light on. An illuminated taxi roof sign is an indication that a Hackney Carriage is available immediately for hire. However, Mr Anayat's vehicle was licensed by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and therefore he was only permitted to ply for hire within that district and not in any other district without a prior booking.

Having witnessed Mr Anayat's vehicle parked with its roof sign lit up, a licensing officer approached and asked Mr Anayat if he could take him to an address in Slough. Mr Anayat replied saying he was available and could do the journey immediately for £50. He then opened the door to allow the officer to enter the vehicle. The licensing officers then introduced themselves and asked to see Mr

Anayat's badge, which was not being worn. Under the guise of retrieving his badge from the vehicle, Mr Anayat drove off.

The District Judge agreed that Mr Anayat's actions were a serious offence which could put public safety at risk. He was therefore disqualified from driving for three months and ordered to pay a £900 fine, £2,000 costs and a £90 victim surcharge.

Councillor Community Grant

The Jubilee Bench was paid for by our Councillor Grant Scheme. As high-lighted last month, Round one of the 2022/23 councillor community grant scheme is now open until midday on 2 September. Grants of up to £5,000 per councillor can be awarded to town and parish councils and 'not for profit' groups. Decisions may be made collectively in wards with multiple councillors.

. . . But so far, we have had one application. Please, if you can use a Grant, apply, as if we don't use it the money will be passed to a (possibly less deserving) Ward!

[See southoxon.gov.uk/grants for more information.](https://southoxon.gov.uk/grants)

Any questions, please contact the community enablement team via grants@southandvale.gov.uk.

Reminder

The Queen's Green Canopy

As part of our Platinum Jubilee celebrations, we want to create a record of all the trees planted for The Queen's Green Canopy across South Oxfordshire.

If you or an organisation in your community planted some trees earlier this year or are planning to do so later in the year as part of the celebrations, please send us pictures of the trees and details of where they're planted to communications@southandvale.gov.uk.

Please download [this poster](#) and put it up around your community so that others can share their images with us too.

For more information visit southoxon.gov.uk/greencanopy.

As ever, there is much more that we could cover, but we will close here.

Lynn Lloyd and Ian White – South Oxfordshire District Council