

SODC ward councillor's report

Shiplake – 12th December 2022

Covid-19

The reliability of data on Covid cases is now much reduced following the end of test and trace. However national figures have shown falls in cases – contrary to what might be expected for this time of year.

At 3rd December, **reported** cases in SODC were at a weekly rate per 100k of population of 55 (it peaked at 1,504 on 6th January 2022) – a low level and one that has increased only slightly - albeit that reporting may be somewhat incomplete.

Indeed Reading BC have ceased reporting their figures because of fears about accuracy. It is fair to note that cold weather has now arrived, together with the Christmas season of socialising. However there seems scope to hope that Covid will only be a modest problem this winter?

In Australia and New Zealand winter flu was more impactful and more virulent than normal and this may well transmit into the UK's winter season. Booster jabs for both Flu and Covid for over 50s and the vulnerable have been and are being rolled out through the autumn.

New CIL rates from 2023

The SODC Council meeting approved the increased rates on 8th December.

Levelling Up and regeneration Bill

This bill is passing through parliament and has been subject to a lot of disagreement. The Secretary of State Michael Gove sent this letter to his MPs seeking to address areas of concern :

https://mcusercontent.com/3036c690a1180c4edb90ae1a0/files/6d2b9179-a5d5-2d7d-07ab-db0d0264c3b4/22125_Michael_Gove_MP_to_all_Conservative_MPs.pdf

We shall need to see what actually transpires, but there are some positive signs that the concerns pressed by many of us about our corrupted and broken planning system are now beginning to attract an appetite for action – as we begin to look forward to elections!

The following indications are given :-

- Recognition that unrealistic top-down targets take power away from communities, and cause erosion of Local plans and fuel resented speculative development in unsustainable locations.
- Standard method formulas that place too much on the South East etc to be reconsidered and also to become merely a “guide”.
- More weight given to designated landscapes.
- The Planning Inspectorate to be reined-in and told not to pursue the old Jenrick agenda. Instead to give more respect to locations approved by local Plans.
- More respect as regards character for prevailing local densities. More local power to dictate minimum standards.

- An end to 5 year Housing Land supply obligations for authorities with up to date plans. Scope for the benchmark in the meantime to fall to 4 years for areas who are well on with making an up to date Local plan.
- Neighbourhood Plans will become more powerful against speculative development and have protection for 5 years rather than just for 2.
- Planning fees – set by the Ministry - will be increased to help with resourcing planning departments – with much higher fees for retrospective applications made by those who have been in breach of planning.
- More pressure on developers to build out sites and scope to take into account bad behaviour in future applications. More consideration of those who “game” the system.
- Annoyingly he seems intent on pressing forward with a new form of infrastructure levy, but is at least allowing Local Planning Authorities to separate Greenfield and Brownfield rates and to set rates and zones locally. (My fear being that s106 is often an important tool.)
- Scope to require local registration of housing for short-term lets – with more local control. A different use class may be considered.
- More emphasis on the internal regeneration of urban areas – particularly cities and large towns.

It is, I suggest, apparent that an approaching general election is, very belatedly, focussing minds! For how long? Nonetheless, the above considerations would surely be rational steps in the right direction.

Councillor Grants Scheme

The Councillor Grant Scheme will close on the 20th January – see www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants.

Appointment of an independent member to SODC and Vale's Joint Audit & Governance Committee

On the 8th December, SODC's council approved the appointment of an expert independent member as part of best practice governance.

AONB extension

A brief for the work required has been developed and has been shared with suppliers. Costing and delivery schedules are being discussed. A first phase of delivery has been approved. The next meeting is pencilled in for 3rd January 2023.

Merry Christmas

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Leigh Rawlins

District Councillor