

## **SODC ward councillor's report**

### **Shiplake – 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

#### **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 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022, **reported** cases in SODC were at a weekly rate per 100k of population of 98 (it peaked at 1,504 on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022) – a low level but one that has increased – even by 31Dec. Evidence suggests that the post-holiday numbers have increased and will show in the upcoming January 2023 numbers - albeit that reporting may be somewhat incomplete.

Separately, there has been significant levels of flu causing some references to a “twindemic” in terms of absences and pressures on the NHS. In Australia and New Zealand winter flu was more impactful and more virulent than normal and this may well echo into the UK’s winter season. Booster jabs for both Flu and Covid for over 50s have been provided.

#### **Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill**

In my last report I noted the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and that 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](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.

Now a draft revised NPPF – with tracked changes - has been released for consultation:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-reforms-to-national-planning-policy>

Many of the above feature, but as yet there is no further detail on any new algorithm for the Standard Method of calculating Housing Need.

### **Councillor Grants Scheme**

The Councillor Grant Scheme will close on the 20<sup>th</sup> January – see [www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants).

### **AONB extension**

A brief for the work required has been developed and has been shared with suppliers. Costing and delivery schedules are being discussed. Indications are that the costs have increased and a new approval is needed by parishes. A first phase of delivery has been approved. The next meeting is pencilled in for 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

Happy New Year all!

**Leigh Rawlins**

District Councillor