

SODC ward councillor's report

Shiplake – 15th May 2023

District elections 4th May 2023

The district elections on 4th May 2023 were the first to be conducted under the Photo ID requirements. Overall turnout seemed similar although some voters were inconvenienced and some disenfranchised on the day.

The results were as follows :-

Party	Seats May 2023	Change (vs 4/23)
Liberal Democrat	21	8
Green	8	3
Henley Residents' Group	3	0
Labour	3	0
Conservative	1	-9
Independent	0	-2
Overall	36	0

Perhaps the most striking comparison is to the position after the May 2015 results when the Conservatives won 33 seats and the Lib Dems, HRG and Labour each won one seat. From holding 33 of the 36 seats then the Conservatives are now reduced to 1 single seat. Such is the effect of the "first-past-the-post" system in which vote share is amplified.

Elsewhere in Oxfordshire there were also significant results. In Vale of White Horse there are 38 seats and like in SODC they were all up for election; 34 Lib Dems were elected and 4 Green councillors. In Cherwell where only a third of the seats were up for election the Conservatives (20 of 48) lost control of their last council in Oxfordshire to No Overall Control. In West Oxfordshire only a third of seats were up for election and the LD. Green and Labour partnership group increased control with the Lib Dems becoming the largest party.

Locally in the Sonning Common ward both seats were won by the Lib Dems – being Leigh Rawlins and Mike Giles.

More detail is available here :-

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/local-democracy-and-elections/elections-and-voting/current-and-upcoming-elections/local-elections-thursday-4-may-2023/>

Other

Due to the elections and the Pre-Election period of pause there is little other news from SODC.

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 6th May 2023, **reported** cases in SODC were at a weekly rate per 100k of population of **27** (it peaked at 1,504 on 6th January 2022) – a very low level - albeit that reporting may be somewhat incomplete. (Many don't report it.)

Separately, there has been significant levels of flu causing some references to a “twindemic” in terms of absences and pressures on the NHS. (Such pressures are also, of course, complicated now by pay disputes.)

Community Land trusts

These are vehicles designed to provide local people with access to housing where there may otherwise be barriers to such access. The intent is generally for such housing to be available in perpetuity at more modest and affordable cost than the market may offer.

There is already an all-Oxfordshire CLT; however my slight concern is that that may imply rather distant administration.

A proposal has been made to consider setting up a South Oxon (SODC) CLT although this has not yet been approved and scheduled for implementation. It could be set up as a CLT with RSL (Registered Social Landlord) accreditation. It would be appropriate for finance, rent collection and tenant/property management to be centralised services; this would ensure proper statutory and regulatory compliance. However there may be scope for a role to enable advisory input from local committees to inform approaches to selections of occupiers etc.

Thame have been working on setting up a CLT for their local area. Henley were also interested and were looking to Thame for help, but they do already have the small Henley & District Housing Trust.

Generally CLTs own the property and rent it out. They can also purchase “affordable” properties from developers (these are usually at a discount roughly equivalent to that purchased value of the land – say 35%) and can be the recipient of SODC funds held as “Commuted” s106 contributions from those developers who for some special reason don't provide “affordable” social housing on the application site.

Along with conventional hybrid rent/part mortgage arrangements, there might also be scope for virtual mortgages to aid occupiers in building up an equity stake with less transaction costs and difficulties. Currently under the conventional approach whereby the tenant may takes, say, 30 or 50% as an owned share, they have to get a fully arm's length mortgage, bear pretty full conveyance costs and also become fully liable for the insurance and repair of the property. These are onerous and costly for a part-share ownership; that said they are quite popular in South Oxon.

Leigh Rawlins

District Councillor