

SODC ward councillor's report

Shiplake – 13th November 2023

District councillor grant scheme

Councillor community grants: A budget of £5,000 is available to each district councillor to fund initiatives aimed at restoring our natural world, and improving community wellbeing. Applications can be made by parish councils, and are [made online](#). There has been a change and SODC will **not** now be offering a 2nd round this year. This change had not been well communicated in advance. The deadline was set for 20 October 2023; however that has now been extended out to a final **30th November 2023**, albeit with requests to get applications in ASAP please! Please do feel free to contact grants@southandvale.gov.uk for guidance and us if we can help. **We know that there has been a problem re the play area bid.**

New grant scheme for rural businesses and communities

SODC has just launched a pot of funding available for rural businesses and organisations based in South Oxfordshire. The fund is designed to support capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure that help to improve productivity and strengthen the rural economy and communities. You can find out more about the fund and the eligibility criteria by visiting the [South Oxfordshire District Council website](#). The deadline for applications is **24 November** – please share with any small businesses or organisations you know and encourage them to apply if they are eligible.

Grants available to look after local green spaces

If you know a local volunteer group or organisation helping enhance nature, they could be eligible for funding from SODC. We've teamed up with Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) on this initiative. The next grant application deadline is 12noon 8 January 2024. If you've got an idea and want to give your project a boost, we recommend you have a quick chat with TOE before applying. Contact Rachel on admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk

Grant scheme for people without gas boilers

Do you know of residents in properties without gas boilers? The good news is that they may be eligible for energy efficiency upgrades for their home, such as insulation, solar panels and heat pumps, all funded by the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2). These upgrades can help to reduce energy bills and make homes easier to keep warm. **The grants are available to homeowners and landlords whose properties are not heated by gas boilers, with a household income of less than £39,000 and with a low energy rating (D-G).** Spread the word and ask people to visit welcomethewarmth.org.uk to find out more.

Grants to support people stay warm and access essentials

A new SODC food and warmth grant will help support people in our communities this winter who may otherwise struggle to afford essential things. The grant is aimed at **local voluntary and community groups, and town and parish councils**, who can use it to support those most in need in the districts. Organisations can apply for grants **between £2,000 to £5,000**, or up to £10,000 for collaborative projects between groups of two or more

organisations. The grant scheme opened week commencing 23 October 2023 and closes at midday **27 November 2023. Decisions are expected to be made within four weeks. For more information, go to the SODC [website](#), or email communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk.**

Affordable housing grant to help address urgent need

More affordable, energy efficient homes will be built in South Oxfordshire thanks to a new improved grant process. As part of the district council's work to help meet the urgent need for genuinely affordable housing in the region, local developers, Community Land Trusts and self-builders can apply for a Section 106 **affordable housing grant to build affordable homes that meet the councils' climate criteria**. For more information and to apply, please visit [the SODC affordable housing page](#).

Free carbon emissions calculator tool

SODC have launched a free simple-to-use carbon emissions calculator tool for town and parish councils to measure their current carbon emissions using energy and fuel bills. It makes it easy to work out where carbon and cost savings can be made. For more information, email climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk

Changes to postal and proxy voting

A series of national changes were introduced on 31 October for postal and proxy voting, and our officers have prepared [this briefing note](#) to explain them in a bit more detail. The changes include new identity checking requirements, online applications, restrictions on the number of people a person can act as a proxy for and maximum periods for absent voter applications.

AONB extension

Work on the AONB extension continues with parish reviews and work for the next phase by the consultants.

Covid-19

At 4th November 2023, **reported** cases in SODC were at a weekly rate per 100k of population of **11** (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, though hospitals are reporting an increase in infection levels through their general testing and we hear of many reporting an infection). The new variant is becoming more prevalent: BA.2.86. The government have reacted by bringing forward inoculations for the vulnerable and 65+ groups – offering Covid and Flu jabs. There are a lot of mutations in the new variant, but the risk not yet fully known. As yet there does not seem to be a proposal to extend inoculations.

Mike Giles & Leigh Rawlins

District Councillors