

SODC ward councillor's report

Shiplake – 8th January 2023

New NPPF

On 19th December Secretary of State Michael Gove released the long overdue new NPPF. His statement to the House of Commons is available here: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-12-19/hcws161>

He suggested that a “BIDEN” structure applied being “Beauty, Infrastructure, Democracy, Environment and Neighbourhood”. The use of “Biden” seems a deliberate recognition of the need for planning and against an aggressive “laissez-faire” approach?

Some of the promised changes for the better seem to have been watered down; For instance it was promised that where developers acted badly or irresponsibly then that poor record could be taken into account in considering future applications. It appears that the development lobby have pushed that proposal (although Gove suggests it would need new legislation; a favourite get-out!).

However there are some benefits. There is more emphasis on up-to-date Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans and more protections for these against speculative development. In particular the 5 year Housing Land Supply requirement is to have much less weight where there is an up-to-date Local Plan and where applications are in conflict with adopted/made plans. **In particular NPs will now get 5 years of high protection (up from 2 years) and the LPA will not need to have a 3 year supply for the NP to get that protection.**

There is to be much less presumption that urban areas can demand “unmet housing need” from surrounding districts and much less presumption that Green Belt land can be built on – especially if the land concerned is attractive, bio-diverse and environmentally significant as regards for instance trees and habitats. The statement suggests that planning fees have been and will be increased to ensure proper resourcing.

Gove claims “In summary, the new NPPF will: facilitate flexibility for local authorities in relation to local housing need; clarify a local lock on any changes to Green Belt boundaries; safeguard local plans from **densities that would be wholly out of character**; free local authorities with up-to-date local plans from annual updates to their five-year housing land supply; limit the practice of housing need being exported to neighbouring authorities without mutual agreement; bolster protections from speculative development for neighbourhoods that develop their own plans; support self-build, custom-build and community-led housing; and cement the role of beauty and placemaking in the planning system.”

It will take time to assess all the changes.

One of the 3rd party reviews of the new NPPF can be found here: <https://www.pegasusgroup.co.uk/briefing-papers/national-planning-policy-framework-update/>

New Joint local Plan – SODC & VoWH – regulation 18 – part 2 consultation

Shamelessly I repeat this item because of its importance.

Preparation is underway for the next stage of South & Vale's Joint Local Plan

A preview of the Joint Local Plan consultation materials is available on both the [South Oxfordshire District Council website](#) and the Vale of White Horse one.

Innovative new planning policies to help South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse to address the challenges we face, are proposed – and you'll soon be able to have your say.

South Oxfordshire and VoWH District Councils are preparing to launch a second round of consultation early next year to develop our new Joint Local Plan to 2041.

The Joint Local Plan will help the councils determine planning applications, set out how and where new housing developments should take place, set standards for developments such as carbon and energy efficiency requirements, and guide what infrastructure is needed across the districts.

The next public consultation will ask for thoughts on proposed approaches across the range of policy areas, from reducing carbon emissions and nature recovery, to protecting and enhancing local heritage, meeting community infrastructure and transport needs, affordable housing, jobs and economic opportunities, and more. New policy areas not addressed in past plans include policies to protect valued landscapes, tranquil places and dark skies.

Backed by the extensive feedback gathered in 2022, as well as a suite of new studies and the latest industry research, the councils propose to reduce the number of new houses needed each year, improve minimum standards for water and energy efficiency, increase biodiversity and the share of affordable houses developments need to deliver, and more.

The first Joint Local Plan consultation received over 2,500 responses through a new interactive platform, for which the councils were announced a finalist in a national award for creating an interactive, digital-first approach in planning.

This innovation will continue in the new consultation, where the councils will be using a new digital engagement platform for people to read easy-to-understand summaries and share their feedback, or delve into the details of the draft policies. This will be as well as holding events and providing paper copies in libraries for those who prefer to get involved in more traditional formats.

The next consultation is scheduled to launch to the public in January 2024.

A direct link to the Joint Local Plan Consultation document: <https://jlp.southandvale.gov.uk/>

A direct link to the Emerging Policies Map: <https://jlp.southandvale.gov.uk/pages/policies-map>

SODC residential waste collection contract extended

Following success, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have announced an agreement, to extend their joint contract with waste contractor, Biffa, for two more years. The contract will now run until June 2026.

The shared contract has helped keep the two districts near the top of the English recycling tables for over a decade.

An impressive 82% of residents responding to survey expressed satisfaction, or high satisfaction, with the overall quality of the service provided.

The councils' joint contract with Biffa has run for 14 years in South Oxfordshire and 13 years in Vale of White Horse – during this time recycling rates have risen to 64% in South and 63% in Vale in 2023. In the ranking of top ten recycling authorities in England, this puts both districts in the top five – with South Oxfordshire second, and Vale of White Horse fourth, respectively.

AONB extension

Work on the AONB extension continues with consultants progressing the next stage of the work for the parish group.

Covid-19

At 9th December 2023, **reported** cases in SODC were at a weekly rate per 100k of population of **23** (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 socially reporting an infection). There has also been some interest in a flu variant being called "China or Chinese flu".

Happy New Year!

Mike Giles & Leigh Rawlins

District Councillors