

## **District Councillor Report – October 2024**

**Cllr Jo Robb, Cllr James Norman**

### **Warm, Dry Homes**

With September being the wettest month on record, we have been contacted in recent weeks by residents struggling with leaks in their rented properties. Some are private tenants, others are social housing tenants. Please do let your residents know that we can support them in their dealings with their social housing provider and work with our council officers and SOHA to get swifter action on leaks or other issues.

SODC also has a housing enforcement team to ensure proper standards are upheld in our private rented sector. The vast majority of private landlords maintain their properties to a high standard, but where tenants are struggling to get action to address leaks or other maintenance issues, the council's enforcement team can assist by working constructively with owners.

Please contact Jo or James if you need help with a maintenance issue on your rented property.

### **Draft Joint Local Plan**

Council approved the Regulation 19 publication version of the new Joint Local Plan on 19<sup>th</sup> September, so we are on target to submit it for inspection in December, taking advantage of the transitional arrangements announced by the Government. From 1<sup>st</sup> October the draft JLP will be available for comment for a period of 6 weeks, enabling stakeholders to give feedback and to comment on whether or not the JLP meets all the relevant requirements. Any comments will be submitted along with the draft JLP to the inspector, although this stage of the process is a highly technical one and is not inviting any new policies or significant changes to the proposed ones.

More information can be found here: <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/planning/the-next-steps-for-councils-joint-local-plan/>

### **Proposed changes to the NPPF**

The Policy team has also responded to the Government's consultation on the new NPPF – You can view the councils' response here: [South response](#)

The main thrust of our response is that we believe local planning authorities are best placed to determine local housing need and that top-down targets are not the right approach. We are also concerned that the progressive and ambitious policies set out in our draft JLP should not be hampered by the drive to build 1.5m houses.

Interestingly, Oxford City Council has been instructed to withdraw its draft Local Plan from examination as the inspector found that the City had not demonstrated meaningful dialogue and cooperation with its neighbouring planning authorities.

### **Grants**

#### **Homes for Ukraine Grant Scheme**

Community organisations are now able to apply for The Homes for Ukraine Grant Scheme with grants ranging from £250 to £2,000. This grant scheme is designed to

help fund projects or services that support the successful integration and settlement of Homes for Ukraine guests into their new communities across the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire.

The scheme opened for applications on 16 September. The grant scheme is being administered in partnership with Cherwell District Council. You can download the application form [from the SODC website](#) alongside this [guidance document](#).

### **Other Ongoing Grants**

A reminder that James and Jo each have £5000 in Councillor Community Grant funding available for groups delivering projects to improve community wellbeing (such as playground equipment or a repair café), or to address the climate and nature emergencies. Please do get in touch if you have a project you'd like funding for. Previous projects have included a scheme to address rural loneliness, new boats for a local rowing club, new playground equipment and supporting a charity that gives support to families that are struggling.

The Council also has grant funding available for nature recovery projects and now has a Revenue Grant Funding pot available to support organisations with their ongoing revenue expenses.

Please do let your local groups know about these opportunities and get in touch with any questions!

### **Council Finances**

It's that time of the year again when we start the process of setting the Council's budget for the next financial year and beyond. We are also now reviewing the results of the 2023/24 budget to see how accurate our projections were and how we used public money to deliver a very wide range of services. I'm pleased to report that the Council's finances remain very robust and our outturn for 23/24 was balanced, with the operational shortfall of around £1m easily covered by increased income from our investments.

Of course, we don't yet know what the new Government will do when it comes to agreeing a financial settlement with local government. We are hoping for an end to the hand-to-mouth approach taken by the previous Conservative Government and a steady reversal in the swingeing cuts which local authorities have experienced for the past 14 years. Crucially, Councils need to be able to plan ahead, so multi-year settlements are essential as is the removal of the wasteful system of competitive bidding for grants, which often come with strings attached and many unhelpful conditions. After all, we are legally required to produce a 5-year financial plan every year, but in the absence of information years 3 to 5 tend to be works of fiction.

### **Home Energy Upgrade Scheme**

Anyone who is struggling and looking for ways to make their home cheaper to heat and more comfortable to live in, may be eligible for free energy efficiency upgrades. With the Home Upgrade Grant from Oxfordshire County Council, homes can be installed with a variety of options from insulation to solar panels.

Applications must be made by 31 October 2024. If household income is less than £39,000 and the energy efficiency rating for the property (EPC) is D or lower, residents can get in touch to see if they could be eligible for up to £38,000 worth of work on your home. Apply through the [website](#) or help us spread the word.