District Councillor Report – November 2023

Cllrs Jo Robb & James Norman

**Help to cut Halloween waste**

Did you know that around 22 million pumpkins go to waste each year - that’s around £32 million worth of edible food! To help reduce food waste, the District Council is encouraging people to cook and eat their pumpkins. There are links to lots recipe ideas on our Halloween waste webpage along with advice on what to do with used Halloween costumes and decorations – <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/halloween-waste/>

If a recipe isn’t an option, then residents can simply leave it out whole next to their bin on their next collection day after Halloween or cut their pumpkin up and put it in their food waste bin – removing any candles or decorations first, or put it in their compost instead, if they have one.

**Free carbon emissions calculator tool**

SODC can supply parishes with a FREE simple-to-use carbon emissions calculator tool (a spreadsheet) designed to help town and parish councils to measure their current carbon emissions. It makes it easy to keep track of the energy used by buildings and vehicles. Once you have this information you can then work out where carbon and cost savings can be made.

The spreadsheet is simple to use:

· You will need copies of your energy bills/statements and vehicle fuel receipts (or mileage records) for the previous financial year.

· You will need to list all sources of carbon emissions under the organisation’s operation (this can include mowing equipment, pool cars, lighting and heating for buildings).

· Once you have input the data your results will be presented as a summary showing where improvements can be made to save energy and money and reduce carbon emissions.

If you are interested in using the carbon emissions calculator, please contact climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk

**Online forum on supporting energy efficiency upgrades to homes**

A reminder that we are hosting a free online forum to help you support residents to reduce their energy use and costs. This will be held online **Tuesday 14 November at 6-7.15pm**. The speakers will talk about the support that is available and some inspiring examples of local projects to help residents. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions. Again, if anyone from the PC is interested in attending, please contact climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk

**Thermal Imaging Camera available to loan**

As the weather gets colder, we will be lending out our thermal imaging camera again to com-munity groups and parishes. They can use the camera to identify spots in buildings where heat is escaping and where energy-saving measures could help make a place more comfort-able and reduce fuel bills at the same time.

Please email climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk for more information.

**National Energy Action Grant**

National Energy Action is running a small grants scheme for organisations to apply to deliver a community event in their local area in support of one of their winter campaigns:

· Poverty Awareness Day (30 November 2023) or

· The Nation’s Biggest Housewarming (11–15 December 2023)

They are looking for a diverse range of partners to support their campaigns by delivering a householder-focused community event to provide information and advice to help as many vulnerable householders as possible, to prepare for winter and to keep warm and well.

They will support your event by providing a simple slide deck featuring key information for householders who are concerned about their fuel bills. Alongside this, they’ll send you a pack of leaflets, pens and a digital poster to help promote your community event.

They are offering grants of up to £250 to support events. The funding must be spent by 29 February 2024. You can use the funds to cover staff time and/or event costs such as room hire and refreshments.

They are seeking applications from charities, community groups, local authorities and housing associations. Funding is limited and NEA reserves the right to prioritise making awards to smaller, localised organisations who can demonstrate reaching marginalised or under-represented people in their application.

For more information and to apply go to [www.nea.org.uk/community-event-application](http://www.nea.org.uk/community-event-application)

**Time to comment on Oxfordshire’s health and wellbeing strategy**

Our colleagues at Oxfordshire County Council are asking residents to comment on the new county wide draft health and wellbeing strategy. The survey is open until 12 November. A partnership across the county has worked on a strategy that gives power to our communities to help deliver what is needed to support people to make healthy choices, live independently and stay happier and healthier for longer. Get involved and have your say via the county council’s website.

**Recent motions passed by SODC Council**

At its meeting on 12th October, SODC Council unanimously passed two motions brought by members. The first, brought by Cllr Jo Robb, was to ensure that all contractors awarded business by the Council sign up to paying the Real Living Wage to their employees. This will mean that the Council can apply to become a Real Living Wage certified employer (direct staff are already paid at least this amount) and will ensure that, where contractors are benefiting from index-linked in-creases in their fees, they will reward their own employees accordingly. (It was discovered at a Joint Scrutiny meeting recently that Saba, the firm which operates the SODC and Vale car parks, only pays the national minimum wage and is struggling to recruit staff.)

The second motion regretted the Government’s recent reductions in its climate targets and called on the Leader of the Council to write to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, requesting a regulatory impact assessment of the outcome of their policy changes, and to seek an assurance and rationale for how they consider these policy changes to be compli-ant with their statutory obligations to meet current and future carbon budgets.

It also resolved that SODC’s Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee (CEEAC) should consider the impact of the UK Government’s u-turn on net zero on the council and district, and review the 2025 and 2030 net zero ambitions and the current 2022-2024 climate action plan in order to set appropriate (and suitably ambitious) targets for the next 4-year plan.

**Affordable Housing Grants now made simpler**

Both councils recently approved an improvement to the existing affordable housing policy to enable funds from Section 106 developer contributions to be used as a grant to build afford-able homes that are energy efficient and cheaper for residents to live in and heat. The policy includes a revamped application process which includes clear evaluation guidelines and free expert consultation services for applicants who would like additional guidance.

This policy is part of the district councils’ work to help meet the urgent need for genuinely affordable rental 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.

**Council Wins Funds for Swimming Pools**

Just announced today (6 November): South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have been awarded just under £450,000 from the government’s £20m Phase-1 Swimming Pool Support Fund. The funds are aimed at supporting council-run pools due to rising energy costs and the financial pressures that are still being felt from Covid-19. Henley Leisure Centre is among the local leisure centres that will benefit from the funding. Last year, the Councils recruited a dedicated grants officer whose job it is to apply for funds released by government as and when they become available.