

District Councillor Update

2 November 2022

Joint Scrutiny: Biffa, GLL and SABA

The Joint Scrutiny Committee met on 20 October to review the performance of our waste, parking and leisure centre contractors against key performance indicators (KPIs).

Despite the challenges facing all three contractors, chiefly around Covid, staff isolating and ongoing issues with recruiting and retaining staff, all three providers performed well overall though missed some key targets and some aspects of service were rated as “weak” against KPIs.

Biffa saw an increase in its missed bin collections, missing its target of no more than 50 missed collections per 100,000. During 2021, 96 collections out of 100,000 were missed. This was an increase from 85 per 100,000 in 2020. Out of almost 14m collections, Biffa missed 13,224, equating to a 99.9 per cent collection rate.

Members of the Committee passed on their thanks to the contractors who attended the meeting and answered questions.

The reports are available to read here:

<https://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/documents/s27737/Agenda%20pack%20for%20Joint%20Scrutiny%20Committee%2020-Oct-22%20South%20and%20Vale.pdf>

SODC Office Move

From Monday 3rd October the offices at Milton Park have been vacated and a core team from the Council has moved to Abbey House in Abingdon; the official address is Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE. Cabinet and Planning Committee Meetings will now take place here and the normal Reception area will be staffed for enquiries throughout the week. The meeting room has been fully equipped for hybrid meetings so that, although Committee members have to attend in person, others making representations on a Planning Application will be able to join using MS Teams as usual. All meetings will continue to be live-streamed. Full Council meetings will take place at the Didcot Civic Hall.

This move will save the Council considerable sums in office rental payments over the next couple of years while we progress with our plans to build new offices at the Didcot Gateway site opposite the railway station.

Joint Bathing Water Application for Wallingford

South Oxfordshire District Council, Wallingford Town Council and Thames21 have submitted a joint application to DEFRA for Bathing Water Status at Wallingford Beach.

The application follows several months of intensive water testing undertaken by volunteers, trained by Thames21, and hard work by residents monitoring usage of the river at Wallingford.

If successful, Wallingford will become only the third stretch of river in the country to have bathing water status. Designation will require the Environment Agency to test the water for faecal bacteria during the bathing season (May-September) and to make these results public. Importantly, it is also the only legal means by which we can compel the water companies to upgrade their sewage treatment works in the “plume of influence” of the bathing water. This would mean investment in failing treatment works at Benson and Dorchester.

The Queen's Canopy

Following the sad passing of Queen Elizabeth, and in accordance with the wishes of the King, the [Queen's Green Canopy](#) initiative will be extended to the end of March 2023 to give people the opportunity to plant trees to honour Her Majesty. SODC is creating a record of all the trees planted across the district for The Queen's Green Canopy and we are asking residents to send pictures of their planted trees to us at communications@southandvale.gov.uk.

More information can be found at: southoxon.gov.uk/greencanopy

Councillor Grants Scheme

As one scheme closes, another one opens! The first round of the Councillor Grant scheme has now closed and we were very pleased to be able to support applications from Stoke Row Parish Council for their new defibrillator, Nettlebed Parish Council for the restoration of its telephone box for community use and Woodcote Parish Council for new playground equipment. There will be a second round for applications opening week commencing 7 November. www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants

Climate Action Plan Performance Report

SODC's first CAP quarterly performance report covering April-June 2022 has been published and is publicly available at <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/tackling-the-climate-emergency/> This report provides a detailed review of activities and outcomes in the first quarter of this financial year and is "RAG rated" (Red/Amber/Green) to indicate where projects are on track, need attention or are at risk. This CAP performance report accompanies the usual quarterly report on the Corporate Plan priorities, which is also available [online](#).

"Call for Sites" for new Joint Local Plan – the results are in

SODC has published the results of our "Call for Land and Buildings Available for Change", part of the process in creating our Joint Local Plan. This process is usually called a Call for Sites, but we changed the name as we wanted sites that could have community and environmental uses, such as public open spaces or renewable energy.

The Comms team has created a very nice short video to explain what the Call for Land and Buildings Available for Change is and what happens next. [You can find the video on our Youtube channel](#).

It's important to note these are **not** proposals the Council is making for development. The Call for Land and Buildings Available for Change does not grant planning permission to any site submitted or confirm that the site will be suitable for development. You can view the full results on [our interactive Call for Land and Buildings Available for Change website](#).

You do not need to contact anyone to say whether you support or object to these sites. We will assess the submissions on a range of environmental, heritage and physical constraints to determine their potential 'suitability', 'availability' and 'achievability'. We will identify sites that may be suitable for further consideration through the Joint Local Plan, and we will consult on them.

You can find out more about the Joint Local Plan on the [South/Vale](#) websites.

Oxfordshire says “no, thanks” to the Government’s proposed Investment Zones

The Leader of OCC, Cllr Liz Leffman, wrote to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, to explain why the County would not be applying for any Investment Zones. SODC’s Leader, Cllr David Rouane, had already expressed our views on the matter and a motion put to Council on 13th October by the Green Group Leader, Cllr Robin Bennett, was passed with cross-party support. See:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/uncategorised/south-oxfordshire-calls-governments-investment-zone-initiative-disaster-in-making/>

With a new prime minister and secretary for Levelling Up, it looks increasingly likely that investment zones will be abandoned anyway. Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Michael Gove, has confirmed that a review into investment zones is underway.

Maximum Taxi Tariffs agreed for Hackney cabs in the District

Hackney carriages operating in South Oxfordshire will, for the first time, have a maximum fare they can charge passengers. Cabinet approved the measure to help ensure passengers, especially those who rely on taxis to travel around such as those on low income or with disabilities, were not priced out of using taxis as the cost of living continues to rise. At the same time, it is hoped the fares agreed will allow taxi drivers to continue to run viable businesses, recognising their overheads are also rising.

We were previously one of only six councils in the country who didn’t set a tariff so introducing them now brings us in line with other authorities - the tariff will still be the 16th highest in the country.

The fares only apply to hackney carriages as passengers are able to shop around with private hire vehicles to get the best deal, which is harder to do when at a taxi rank or hailing a cab. The fares only apply for journeys within the South Oxfordshire area.

The new maximum fare for a two-mile journey on Tariff 1 will be £8.10, rising to £11.25 for Tariff 3 (applicable from 2am to 5.59am on weekdays and all day Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year’s Day). Among the changes was also introducing a new £1.50 charge for additional passengers in vehicles which can carry more than four persons.

“Park and Charge” scheme wins an award

We are pleased to report that the Park and Charge scheme that put 124 electric vehicle chargers in 10 of the council-run car parks across both districts has won an excellence award, called an “Evie”. Evidence is showing that the charging bays are being used more and more. We understand the frustration of some who see empty spaces, but the project was about creating electric charging infrastructure for people in town centres who cannot access charging on the street. Ensuring chargers are available is key in encouraging people to make the switch. Those from out of town are also benefiting and more widely, Oxfordshire has one of the highest uptakes of electric vehicles in the country - this is being attributed to the fast rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Speeding on the A4074 and A4130

SODC’s representative on the Police and Crime Panel, Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye, asked the Police and Crime Commissioner why there has been no action on speeding and motorbike noise on the A4074 and A4130. The PCC has responded positively by reaching out to Crowmarsh Parish Council, now may

be the time for Bix to request a meeting for an update on the success of trials of new technology and measures to address speeding.