

SODC Councillor's Monthly Report July 2017

New acting Chief Executive. Following David Hill's resignation South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have appointed Mark Stone as their Acting Chief Executive. Mark is currently the Councils' Interim Chief Operating Officer and has over 20 years of local government experience, which has included positions at Devon, Wiltshire and Enfield councils, in addition to working in the civil service. Mark lives in Didcot with his wife and family

Councils recover over £1.6million unpaid council tax. Over £1.6million in council tax arrears was recovered last year thanks to enforcement action taken by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils. In 2016/17 the councils issued over 5,300 court summonses to people who had failed to pay their council tax. Magistrates then granted liability orders against 3,600 of those individuals – this meant enforcement action, including the use of bailiffs, could be taken to retrieve the money. Almost all of those in arrears then paid the money they owed, however the councils were forced to take further action against 96 people to ensure they paid their fair share towards the cost of providing public services. This resulted in 53 people receiving charging orders – which allows the councils to enforce the sale of a persons' property to retrieve the money. One person who deliberately failed to pay was sent to prison, while seven were given suspended sentences. The councils also recovered and saved a further £167,000 after 62 people were caught claiming discounts on their council tax they weren't entitled to. This resulted in nine being prosecuted in court and 47 fined.

Didcot Garden Town proposed delivery plan and consultation published. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council have published the Didcot Garden Town proposed delivery plan and consultation. The consultation will run from 19 June to 31 July 2017. The plan proposes significant new public open spaces, leisure facilities, schools, health centres and an upgrade to the station with improved access to the railway museum. Infrastructure, such as roads, cycle paths and utilities are planned alongside a mix of affordable and private rented homes. Gerry Brough, Interim Head of Development, Regeneration and Housing at South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council said: "The views of local residents and organisations has helped us design a plan that the people and visitors of Didcot can be proud of. Better homes, better access into the town and more green spaces for families to enjoy. I urge everyone to look at the plans and have their say." Some expansions to the town have been approved and are already underway, such as phase two of the Orchard Centre. This expansion forms part of wider plans to transform Didcot into a garden town to accommodate 16,000 new homes and supporting 20,000 new jobs in the Science Vale over the next two decades.

Takeaway is fined after rats are found in food storage building. A kebab takeaway in Didcot has been fined after council officers found that a food storage building was infested by rats. On Tuesday 6 June at Oxford Magistrates' Court, Ferhat Bakabala, the proprietor of the Didcot Kebab, previously known as 'Delight 2', pleaded guilty to four food safety offences. As a result, he was fined £2,000 and ordered to pay £1,500 costs and pay a £50 victim surcharge. Magistrates heard how following a tip off from a member of the public in August 2016, food safety officers inspected 'Delight 2' and found that a storage building at the rear of the premises was infested with rats. They saw rats in the window before entering the area and even found live rats caught in a waste oil barrel. The building was also filthy with dirt and rat droppings and had construction defects that allowed pests access to the storage building and important cleaning and pest control procedures were not being followed. No evidence of rat activity was found in the takeaway kitchen which is in a separate main building, meaning the takeaway itself could remain in operation. Officers immediately prohibited the takeaway from using the storage building and forced them to dispose of all food containers which had been stored there. Council officers revisited the storage building a number of times following the original inspection. Within two months Mr Bakabala had made sufficient improvements to the structure of the building and to his pest control procedures. As a result, officers lifted the prohibition and allowed the takeaway to use the building again.

Local Plan. Officers are currently analysing responses to the phase two consultation. It is expected that SODC councillors will have the opportunity to scrutinise the officer's findings at a Scrutiny meeting on September 14th before recommendations go to Cabinet on 21st September and Full Council on 28th September. There will still be more consultations before final decisions on what goes to a public enquiry before an independent planning inspector for his final decisions on what the plan will contain.

New refuge collection vehicles. £6.5 million pounds has been invested in a brand-new fleet of waste and recycling trucks, providing new and improved collections to households across South Oxfordshire. The trucks are due to commence service in the autumn and will replace the old vehicles which are becoming unreliable as they reach the end of their life. The new vehicles, managed by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' contractor Biffa, will carry out the waste, recycling and food recycling collection services for all 115,000 households across the two districts.

Councillor Grant Scheme. I was hoping to be able to give you the final details of the District Councillor's personal grant scheme which I spoke about at your last meeting. However, training meetings and details of what can be funded was postponed. The scheme will give each District Councillor £5000 to grant aid projects in their ward. As soon as I get the details I will furnish you with the information. The District Council will also furnish you and Parish magazines with details. Please bear in mind that I will have to look at bids from three Parish Councils and one Parish Meeting together with any organisations which may apply. When I

was a County Councillor I administered a similar scheme and several Parish Councils used the grant to add to their own money to make it go further on a project.

David Turner

12th July 2017