

SODC Councillor's Monthly Report February 2021

The Beacon in Wantage becomes location for COVID-19 symptom-free testing programme. From 23 February The Beacon in Wantage will become a Covid-19 testing site for public-facing workers and volunteers who are not displaying symptoms. People in these roles who cannot work from home and do not have access to workplace testing will be able to book a free test at the centre via the county council's online booking system on their website. Tests take only 15 minutes with results available within an hour. South and Vale District Councils have worked closely with partners across Oxfordshire to help set up this rapid symptom-free testing site to help stop the spread of the virus, protect the NHS and vital social care services, and ultimately to save lives. Around 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 have no symptoms but can still pass it on and so regular testing of public-facing workers will help to stop the spread of the virus. Oxfordshire County Council is working with Public Health England to run three sites across the county with support from the district councils. Employees from Thames Valley Police and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue were the first to be tested at the centre, followed by early years workers and council staff in key public-facing roles. The 15-minute test being used is a lateral flow test which involves taking a swab of the back of the throat and inside the nose. The swab is then given to trained staff at the test centre who process the test on-site. Results are given within an hour by text message or by email. Anybody who tests positive is provided with detailed information of how to self-isolate, along with advice on the support that is available for them through their isolation period. The Beacon is an arts and community centre in Wantage which is run by the District Council but has been closed to the public during the pandemic. It will be used as a symptom-free test centre for as long as is required to help stop the spread of Covid-19.

£240,000 for newt conservation. South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils have helped raise more than £240,000 for great crested newt habitats. The funds have been raised over three years through an ongoing, innovative conservation scheme to protect the newts, which are a European protected species. The councils have a Natural England licence allowing them to authorise developers to undertake work that may impact the newts. In return, the developer invests in habitat creation and maintenance, providing the newts with new places to thrive. So far 13 developments have been authorised (five in South Oxfordshire and eight in the Vale). These have resulted in 23 high quality great crested newt ponds being created as well as 116 hectares of terrestrial habitat. Funds are also secured to ensure management and monitoring of this habitat for at least the next 25 years.

New Tree Champions embark on ecology and climate work for South Oxfordshire.

South Oxfordshire District Council has appointed two Tree Champions in a further boost to its efforts to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies. Cllrs Ian Snowdon & Peter Dragonetti are the new Tree Champions. Their work will form part of a wider drive to protect and restore nature across South Oxfordshire.

SODC Councillor's Personal Grant budget. I have approved the following three applications:

- £987 for Chalgrove/Watlington First Steps Children's Centres for a new project to deliver a new project. This is a plan for 2021/22 to support parents with babies and young children during Covid and post Covid. This will provide emotional support and communication via social media, email and telephone in lockdowns and daily sessions whenever we can open safely. The need to reduce loneliness, isolation and anxiety has proved to be very high and the demand for sessions increased dramatically from parents across 17 villages in South Oxfordshire with highest numbers from Watlington and Chalgrove where facilities are based. The ability to respond flexibly to needs is essential to the success of the project. Note. the Watlington Ward District Councillor has agreed an equal amount
- £2000 for new play apparatus in Brightwell Baldwin Parish.
- £2013 for Thame River Trust for work on Chalgrove Brook (river) to improve water quality and work on the banks to improve habitat for various species.

These were the only three applications which I received in the round of grants in the current financial year. A new grants scheme will open later in the next financial year for which I will again have £5000 available. I will advise the details later in the year, but please be thinking now about grants you might be interested in applying for. The criteria are not expected to change.

Please see the other four items attached in the email.

David Turner
SODC Councillor (Chalgrove Ward)
1st March 2021