

District Councillor Update: Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers

Ward member for Goring and South Stoke

Aug/Sept 2023



Dear Goring and South Stoke parish councillors and residents,

Please see below my latest set of updates. There are several new grants schemes for PCs and community groups so please do have a read and apply as early as possible.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

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New grant scheme opportunity for Electric Vehicle chargers

A great opportunity for town councils, parish councils and community-focused non-profit organisations to potentially secure funding for Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers by early 2024. We are encouraging towns and villages to register interest in a proposed Community EV Microhubs scheme which could provide one or two chargers in areas that currently have limited EV charging provision.

This is all being made possible thanks to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), working in partnership with Oxfordshire local authorities, to use government funding to provide a network of public EV charging. Expressions of interest can be submitted through the OCC's consultation platform Let's Talk Oxfordshire: <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ev-microhubs-eoi>

The closing date for expressions of interest is **15 September 2023**. Please help us spread the word.

Councillor Community Grants Funding

A new round of funding from the Councillor Community Grant scheme has launched in South Oxfordshire, to help local charities and organisations across the district. As part of the scheme, every ward in South Oxfordshire has funding to support local projects that directly benefit local residents. Organisations can now apply for grants from £250 up to a maximum of £5,000 from each ward councillor where the project is located.

Before applying, applicants are encouraged to get in touch with their local councillor to discuss their project and visit our website for further information and details on eligibility. Applications are made online and are open until midday on **Friday 20 October 2023**.

You can find out more about the Councillor Community Grant scheme on our website at www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants or by contacting the Community Enablement team at: grants@southandvale.gov.uk

£50,000 fund to increase biodiversity and encourage public access to green spaces

In a new partnership with **Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE)**, the money will be given as grants through TOE's Local Environment Fund to help boost local nature recovery efforts and reduce the impacts of climate change.

Community groups, town and parish councils, charities and non-profit organisations are invited to apply to TOE for funds to help look after South Oxfordshire's green spaces. Grants ranging between £1,000 and £15,000 can be used for tree and hedgerow planting or restoring community orchards, ponds, and nature-rich meadows. Grants could also be used to improve access to nature for the public to enjoy and learn from. This could include replacing stiles with gates for better accessibility and also improving pathways.

The new fund uses money from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) paid by developer contributions. Early applications are encouraged, so any South Oxfordshire based group involved in protecting and restoring their local environment should contact TOE to find out more.

Detailed guidance and application forms are on www.trustforoxfordshire.org.uk/local-environment-fund. The first deadline application deadline is **2 October 2023**, then **8 January 2024**. Submissions close at midday. To check that your project idea meets TOE's funding criteria, contact Rachel Sanderson, Local Environment Fund grant administrator: admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk and 01865 407003.

Capital Grant Scheme

This year's Capital Grant Scheme is due to open this week on the 11th Sept. Voluntary and community organisations in South Oxfordshire can now apply for up to £75,000 in funding for projects that help improve people's quality of life. The funding comes from the latest round of the South Oxfordshire District Council Capital Grant Scheme. The council has a total budget of £320,000. Projects can receive a minimum of £1,000 and up to 50 per cent of their total costs, to the maximum value of £75,000.

The grant gives organisations a financial boost towards capital expenditure such as making improvements to buildings or play areas.

Applicants must show how their projects will support the council's Corporate Plan priorities including 'protect and restore our natural world', 'action on the climate emergency' and 'improved economic and community well-being'.

The Capital Grant Scheme is now open for applications until midday on Friday 3 November 2023. There's more information on the council's website: southoxon.gov.uk/grants

SODC Offices

The plans for the new offices in Didcot have now been submitted and you can comment here:

Why a new office?

The old office was burnt down in 2015. The then administration moved the council into very expensive rented offices on Milton Park. The new administration activated the break clause in the lease, moved into temporary accommodation in Abingdon, and started to look for a permanent home.

Why not stay in Abbey House?

It is an old building which would need a fortune spent on renovation if we were staying there permanently. It also doesn't have a space big enough for the council to meet, and the transport links from the rest of the district aren't good. The Vale, which owns it, may also have alternative uses for it in the long term.

Why Didcot?

Didcot lies at the centre of the 2 districts and this site is opposite a rail, bus and cycle transport hub. The site is owned by SODC and is one of the first things that people see when they get off the train. Didcot deserves better than for this site to be a car park or another block of flats.

Doesn't everybody work from home now?

Not everyone, some need to be in the office most days whereas others come in for team activities, but for this reason the proposed council office is significantly smaller than the old office at Crowmarsh. The ground floor will have public space, a square, a cafe, meeting spaces, and accommodate the public facing areas of the council. Above will be the more private offices and above that commercial office space to generate income and bring jobs into the town centre.

Is it a 'gamble with public money'?

The plans have been carefully assessed by our finance officers and will be continually checked as the project progresses. These people do not 'gamble'. Opponents often quote the outline cost but omit the insurance money which can only be used for this (about £6m), any income gained from the Crowmarsh site, the saving in rent and energy costs (about £1m a year), and the income to be generated from renting out part of the building. Any regeneration of this site will cost money, the alternative is to leave the site derelict or sell it to a developer for yet more housing.

Where will everyone park?

There will be a small on-site car park for visitors and those with disabilities but, in a rare act of forward planning, the government funded a multi-storey car park at the station with 385 spaces which is currently little used because of the car parks currently on the Gateway site.

What about the look of it, where are the solar panels?

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Everyone has an opinion but please make suggestions. I particularly like the idea of a railway style clock tower in front of the building. The pictures released so far show the north facing side of the building, the solar panels are around the back facing south.

New Food Action Working Group Launched

Last week I had the pleasure of chairing the newly formed Food Action Working Group. It brought together a variety of stakeholders including council officers, local growers and farmers, food banks and larders, and food processing businesses. Convening the working group is an important step in developing and implementing the Oxfordshire Food strategy, a multi-stakeholder strategy developed in consultation with the Good Food Oxfordshire Network.

The Oxfordshire Food Strategy Part 1 was endorsed by Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, Cherwell District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and South & Vale District Councils between May and December 2022. Part 1 of the strategy:

- Established the strategic challenge of food in Oxfordshire;
- Defined the vision and strategic priorities and identified the influencing factors and priority areas for action;
- Identified links to existing initiatives to build and strengthen, and new areas where we need to build more foundational knowledge.

Part 2 of the strategy now needs to start. The priorities for Part 2 are to:

- Continue and strengthen existing programmes and campaigns;
- Embed actions to deliver these strategic priorities in existing policies and plans;
- Develop detailed Food Action Plans with each key stakeholder;
- Initiate foundation projects to build our knowledge base and inform detailed implementation plans for new initiatives.

The purpose of the Food Action Working Group (FAWG) is to oversee the development and implementation of a multi-stakeholder food action plan for South Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse. If you wish to be involved or kept up to speed please email:

suzi.wild@southandvale.gov.uk

South Oxfordshire Bathing Water Status

Do you spend time around the River Thames in Wallingford? Or know people who do? If so environmental charity we are working with on Bathing Standards, **Thames21** would like to hear from you. It has opened a public consultation for its project to achieve bathing water status at Wallingford which South Oxfordshire is supporting. If you would like to answer the survey about bathing in the Thames at Wallingford please see this bathing water survey:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=7akz1zsZGk-lsdAaYSTR_rRzvStYi89MizBjUKLIP3JUNkxYSDFMWTZFOVhTRk9TMzFPUzNISURHRy4u&wdLOR=c15CACFD3-75B7-403D-9F15-70BA1B55C483

It only takes five minutes to complete. You can also find out more on the project page: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/a012b2c0795d41c3b8cc69b5fd2c43ef>

Please help spread the word.

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete

With the current focus on the national issue with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC), we wanted to reassure members of our communities of the work we are undertaking to check all council owned buildings.

We are not aware of, and have no reason to believe, there are any issues with our council properties. However, in light of the increased national concern around Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC), our property team is as a priority, currently reviewing our building records. We will follow up if necessary and this will include taking concrete samples for further analysis if needed. Our approach is purely a matter of caution and diligence given the national situation.

Have Your Say Open Consultations and Engagement

1. Our landscapes and what's changing them

A new study has launched to better understand, protect and enhance the unique landscapes we enjoy and treasure across South Oxfordshire. This study will help inform the councils' work towards the Joint Local Plan, which shapes future policies and help guide planning application decisions for the districts – something very important to us all. We're invited to share what we love about local landscapes and what we think is changing them. On a new interactive map, we can add comments on different landscapes and places we value. This feedback will help our council understand the local landscapes, what should be done to maintain them. Visit <https://south-and-vale-landscape-character-assessment-luc.hub.arcgis.com/> by **29th September** to have your say.

2. Permitted development rights changes

The Government has recently published a consultation on changes to permitted development rights. This consultation runs until 25 September and you can find out more on what areas it covers on the Government website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/permitted-development-rights>

It includes a call for evidence led by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs seeking views on nature-based solutions, farm efficiency projects and diversification.

I hope you find these updates helpful

Sincerely,

Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers

