

Abingdon on Thames Town Council

Wednesday 1 December 2021

Agenda Item 7 - District Council report

Civil Parking Enforcement

From 1 November, officers from a new team at Oxfordshire County Council began patrolling the streets of the Vale of White Horse to help prevent illegal parking. The county council is taking on this responsibility for on-street parking from Thames Valley Police in a move aimed at helping to ease congestion and cutting down on pollution.

The CPE officers are responsible for enforcing:

- Permit holder parking and on-street pay and display parking
- Double and single yellow lines
- Limited waiting bays
- Loading bays
- Zig-zag markings at schools (if restrictions apply)
- Pedestrian crossings
- Double parking (parking too far from the kerb)
- Blue Badge bays
- Taxi ranks
- Parking in bus lanes and stops
- Parking across dropped kerbs where there's a crossing point, with or without tactile paving

The local agreement with Abingdon Town Council to enforce pay and display bays and residents parking has now ended.

There are two levels of fine/penalty charge:

- £70 for more serious offences such as parking on yellow lines
- £50 for less serious offences such as overstaying in a limited waiting bay

These fines are reduced to half if paid within the time period stated on the parking charge note.

Residents can report illegal parking via this link:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/parking/illegal-parking>

The police will continue to be responsible for dealing with:

- dangerously parked vehicles including where there are no parking restrictions in place such as on bends, brows of hills and junctions
- obstruction offences - pavement with no parking restrictions
- moving traffic offences including double white lines, one-way traffic

New District Councils Building – Didcot Gateway

South Oxfordshire Cabinet has approved the concept design for the new district council building at Didcot Gateway and the detailed design process is now getting underway. The concept design for the building is available to view on the council's [website](#). The new building will be home to the shared offices with Vale of White Horse District Council.

The councils have been working in temporary offices at Milton Park since June 2015, five months after their shared headquarters in Crowmarsh Gifford were burnt down in an arson attack. The councils had been planning to build new offices at Crowmarsh but having adapted successfully to a mix of home and office working during the pandemic, they realised that they needed significantly less office space than originally planned.

A number of alternatives for the new headquarters were looked at as well as rebuilding at Crowmarsh. These included a return to New Abbey House and continuing to rent at Milton Park.

SODC already own the site opposite Didcot Station, so taking into account capital and ongoing revenue costs this was the cheapest option.

The site was already due for regeneration and is ideally placed next to public transport connections, making it an environmentally sustainable choice.

In line with the councils' commitments to tackle the climate emergency, the offices will be built to meet a strict sustainability standard, known as the BREEAM Excellent standard – this would put the building in the top 10 per cent of new non-domestic buildings in the UK in terms of its sustainability performance. To help meet that standard, the building will feature solar panels on its roof and potentially even on covered visitor parking spaces.

To help the councils meet their commitments to building stable finances, the building will also include commercial office space the councils can let to a third party.

The location opposite the station should help to encourage sustainable commuting and the flexible space will accommodate organisations, which like the council want to explore more flexible ways of working after the pandemic. The central site will also be more accessible to the public than the current offices at Milton Park.

Vale Council Budget 2022-23

This is the time of year when all councils begin to determine their budget for the next financial year. For the Vale council this will be another tough budget as we continue to deal with the fallout from Covid-19.

The Leader of the Vale of White Horse District Council has written to Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, with proposals for changes to the way councils are funded to reduce financial pressures before they have an impact on public services.

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council, Wednesday 1 December 2021
Item 7

The letter asks the government to give low-cost, high-performing local authorities like the Vale greater freedom over their finances, and to level-up inequalities in how high performing, low cost councils are funded.

The Vale is a lean and efficient council, providing good value for its residents, keeping costs low while providing high quality services. The revenue costs of the council are just £120 per resident per year, compared to the average of similar neighbouring councils of around £136, and the English average of just over £133.

The council has used benchmarking data from the government and independent organisations, including LG Futures, the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), and the Local Government Association (LGA) to confirm its status as a low-cost, high-performing council.

However, changes to the way councils are funded have caused a significant reduction in income for some councils, and income has not kept pace with cost increases, some of which are driven by an increase in the number of households in the district. Restrictions on council tax increases therefore mean that efficient, low-cost councils like the Vale that have historically kept council tax low, are unable to find effective ways to increase their income to fund their services.

The government's approach of using some of the Business Rates raised locally to fund councils is also having a negative impact on the Vale's finances. The Vale receives much less funding than similar councils through this system – a problem that was made worse because the district's single biggest business rates payer – Didcot A Power Station – closed the day before the system was introduced.

The council has also been hit by ongoing uncertainty over the future of the New Homes Bonus scheme. This is designed to help districts like the Vale that have seen a large amount of house building, but the government has recently consulted on changes to the scheme that could make it less generous and has yet to announce the results of that consultation.

The Vale has the fifteenth lowest Band D council tax precept in the country – £142, which is nearly £60 less than the average shire district of £199.

Despite the low return from business rates in the district, the uncertainties of other HM Government funding streams and thanks to its efficiencies as a council, the Vale wouldn't have needed to draw on reserves if it were able to set a council tax rate of just below the national average. However, the restrictions prevent councils like the Vale from doing this, effectively penalising efficient councils that have historically kept their council tax low.

The letter is available on the council's website www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/official-correspondence/ and proposes changes to the two per cent/£5 referendum threshold that was included in the 2021/22 local government settlement, to allow councils that have behaved in a financially prudent way, and have provided sound reasons, to be given the freedom and flexibilities they need to mitigate future financial distress and cover the shortfalls generated by the recent national changes to council funding.

Abbey Meadow Outdoor Pool – 2021 Season

This year there were 13,303 pool users for the 8 weeks that the pool was open. During the same period in 2019 there were 18,692. The season started strong, then colder weather hit and numbers reduced, then increased for the one last warmer week at the end of August.

A more detailed breakdown of the figures showed that throughout the season, most swimmers used the pool between 10.00 - 15.00 each day, irrespective of the weather.