

District Councillor Report for Annual Town Meeting 10.4.14

I am Jeni Wood the District Councillor for Henley-on-Thames South Ward but at South Oxfordshire District Council I represent the whole of Henley-on-Thames as one of the 2 HRG District Councillors.

As a District Councillor I can act as your conduit to District Council and am always happy to speak to SODC Officers, Cabinet Members or anyone else on your behalf or from whom I can acquire relevant information for you.

The way the District Council is managed is quite different from that of Henley Town Council as it is run on a 'Cabinet' System rather like the Government and because Liz Hodgkin and I form a minority party we sit on, between us, only 6 committees. I sit on Planning, Community Governance Review and the Communities Capital Grants (formerly known as the Community Investment Fund or CIF) Committees. The **CCG fund** was established from the sale of housing stock in July 1997.

Approximately £1,000,000 per year is distributed in capital grants. To date, the fund has distributed over £12 million in grants. The council offers small grants to applications requesting under £15,000 and large grants to applications requesting over £15,000 up to a maximum of £100,000. I would urge any one belonging to a Community Group which would be helped by receiving such a grant to apply. Contact the very helpful Officers by telephone 01491 823136, e-mail grants@southandvale.gov.uk.

The **Community Governance Review Group** does just what it says on the tin which includes taking action, after debate, discussion and deliberation on town and village boundaries. Unfortunately at the last meeting of the Committee any members having an interest were replaced by members who did not therefore I was not allowed to attend the meetings which appertained to the Boundary changes affecting Henley with Harpsden and Harpsden with Shiplake which was very frustrating as I was unable therefore to put forward the local point of view.

The Minority parties at SODC, have formed a Group of Opposition members; we meet every month and invite the Chief Executive and one of the Strategic Directors to speak and bring us up to date on any matters currently being discussed /debated by Cabinet, the latest Government Policies/ policy changes at SODC plus any localised matters— we are privileged to have such sessions as the information gleaned is always valuable and absolutely vital if we are to carry out our duties to the full, especially when it comes to producing the "Opposition's budget" which we always hope will give the majority party cause to pause before voting through any budget matters which we feel will affect our Residents negatively. We always agree with not increasing Council Tax if that is an option and I am proud to say the District Council has strived to keep Council tax increases low/negligible whilst still supporting the Town Councils with grants to assist with Council tax benefit despite the complete reduction in subsidies from Government and to still provide the excellent Services we Residents have come to expect from our District Council.

To keep up to date with legislation; I endeavour to attend every training session on any subject offered at SODC as I have found that matters not affecting Henley at any one time can suddenly become ones that do affect the town eventually and therefore constant training is vitally important especially in Planning matters where the Government Policy constantly changes and one of my greatest fears is allowing building in the Green belt. I am passionate about protecting the AONB which is so important in keeping our District of South Oxfordshire beautiful. Whilst supporting fully the Local Enterprise initiatives we must be very mindful of what is built where and how. Luckily our Core Strategy protects us against anything too outrageous and our Officers are treading slowly and carefully in the SHMA debate. Due to Henley being situated in a valley, building is constrained and we should not expect to have many more houses than we were given in the Core Strategy, I will fight very hard to keep the present status quo on housing numbers.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need my help or wish to discuss any matter appertaining to SODC.