

Dig In! Free Compost Giveaway

With spring just around the corner, we are holding two compost giveaways in March to help residents to get their gardens flourishing, save money and reduce waste.

People can fill up to three bags of high-quality compost per household, but they must bring their own bags and a spade! The offer is only available while supplies last.

The event takes place on:

- **Sunday 17 March (South residents only)** - 9am -11am in Crowmarsh at the land of the former council office on Benson Lane.

Our friendly Waste and Recycling team will also be on hand to share tips composting and answer questions.

2024/25 Council Budget

At its Full Council meeting on 22nd February, SODC approved its budget for 2024/25, including the outlook for the next four years (the Medium Term Financial Plan). While the later years are highly speculative due to the absence of any long-term financial settlement from the Government, the plans for the next two financial years are robust and balanced. Thanks to careful budgeting and higher interest rates the draw on reserves will be much less than had been expected at this time last year (£1.5m versus £3m), and we have also protected all service areas by making no cuts at all. The £500k allocated to our various grant schemes is also included (on top of the new CIL Grant Fund described below). Given all of the stories in the press these days about Council finances, it is reassuring to be able to report that SODC is in a much stronger position than many and still has some opportunities to invest in our corporate plan priorities.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Grant Fund

South Oxfordshire District Council has just launched a new grant scheme called the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Grant Fund. Town and parish councils and not for profit community groups and organisations will be able to bid for between £75,000 to £250,000 for a wide range of infrastructure to support existing or planned future growth in the district.

The council collects CIL funding from liable developments in order to deliver the infrastructure required to support growth in the district. Through this pilot scheme, we're helping to fund local organisations to deliver infrastructure for their community required as a direct result of development.

Eligibility: You can find more information about the Grant Fund and view the full eligibility criteria online, a few points to note:

- The fund is available to town and parish councils and not for profit community groups and organisations only.
- Proposed projects need to have a genuine focus on providing the infrastructure needed as a result of development and must be delivered in the South Oxfordshire District Council area.
- Proposed projects must adhere to the CIL spending requirements as set out in the regulations – the fund may only be used to support the actual delivery of physical infrastructure. It can be new infrastructure or improve or expand the reach of existing infrastructure. It is not able to cover costs for scoping or pre-planning of projects.
- We will prioritise projects that support our corporate priorities and other key criteria to ensure deliverability, sustainability, inclusivity and consideration towards the climate and ecological impacts.

How to apply:

You can submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) from week commencing 19 February 2024. The EOI stage will be open for six weeks and you can view the guidance materials now to help prepare. We will be in touch again once submissions open. Following the EOI process, applicants whose projects meet the funding requirements will be invited to submit a full application. If you have any questions, please send them to infrastructureobligations@southandvale.gov.uk.

Elections help

We're still looking for people to work in polling stations on Thursday 2 May for the Police and Crime Commissioner Election. Please help us to spread the word by displaying [the South Oxfordshire poster](#) in local community buildings and on public noticeboards and by sharing our recruitment messages in local newsletters and on social media.

New council energy saving leaflets available

The council's climate team is promoting advice and financial support available for residents for energy saving measures ranging from draught proofing to solar panels.

This includes direct support from the councils as well as from partners such as Better Housing Better Health and from government schemes. There are two versions of a leaflet full of useful information on this topic, one for online use and one to be printed – they are both available here ([South/Vale](#)). If you would like some copies to distribute within the parish please email climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk

Joint Local Plan - Many thanks to those who submitted feedback to the recently closed Regulation 18 consultation on the preferred options for the new Joint Local Plan. The consultation events were very successful, and analysis of those attending indicated that over 50% had not engaged with the District Council on such matters previously. This is very satisfying because we were explicitly aiming to reach more “lesser heard” voices and chose venues where unrepresented groups would be more likely to attend (e.g. local cafes). We will take forward these learnings for future consultations, particularly on the new Corporate Plan.

Changes coming next year to garden waste service in South and Vale

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have set out plans to change the way their garden waste service is paid for in 2025.

The councils' have agreed the introduction of a permit scheme from April 2025 which will include subscribers receiving a sticker for their bins to identify them as fully paid-up garden waste customers.

This kind of scheme is offered successfully by many other local authorities, including in neighbouring West Oxfordshire.

When customers sign up and pay for the scheme in 2025, they will be sent a garden waste permit sticker to put on their bin/or bins, which will help the waste collection crews identify which bins should be emptied. The permits will act in a similar way to a parking permit as a proof of subscription payment. All subscribers will receive a new sticker annually each time they renew.

This will help to ensure that only households that have paid for the service have their brown garden waste bins emptied.

The changes are part of the councils' ongoing work to improve the efficiency and value of public services.

The garden waste subscriptions currently run via annual direct debit payments from the date people signed up for the scheme. Next year, the councils will stop taking direct debit payments for the service. Customers will instead make a single annual payment by debit or credit card - so that everyone's payment year will run from 1 April to 31 March each year.

The council will directly contact all customers, via letters and email, in plenty of time to remind them to renew.

Benefits to customers include an all-new online system so they can manage their account and change their details much more easily. This will also mean the councils can contact people quickly if there are any disruptions to the service, such as during adverse weather.

Current subscribers will receive notification of the changes with this year's invoices. This will provide more information on the new system in **2025** as well as details of changes to their direct debit payment this year and the annual fee increase to cover the cost of running the service. It also contributes to our excellent recycling rates – where only this month, South Oxfordshire has been ranked as the top recycling district in England.

“The new permit scheme will help enhance our service’s efficiency. The option for an online account should be easier for customers and will mean that you don’t need to contact us if your bank account or other details change. The new permit stickers will help us to make sure that only those who pay for the service actually get collections, which we think is only fair, since this is an opt-in service.”

“We do appreciate that any changes to a major service can initially be challenging so we will make sure all our customers are contacted and fully informed on all changes that are coming now and from April 2025. There is also a FAQ on our website with further detailed information.”

An FAQ covering all the changes is available on our garden waste section: [South FAQ](#) / [Vale FAQ](#). The councils’ customer services team will also be on hand to assist with any queries customers have.

Residents in South Oxfordshire were officially ranked the best recyclers in the country, with residents in the Vale a close third, according to a [government league table](#) published in early February.

As of November 2023, there were around 59,300 live accounts (31,500 South and 27,800 Vale). Some properties have more than one bin, so this equates to around 66,300 bins (South 36,000 Vale 30,300).

The Future Homes and Buildings Standards

The government is consulting on a series of changes to building regulations for homes and non-domestic buildings.

The changes all relate to improving the energy efficiency and reduction of carbon emissions of new homes and non-domestic buildings. This covers topics such as conservation of fuel and power.

You can [find out more and take part here](#).

The consultation closes at 11:59pm on 6 March 2024.

Strengthening planning policy for brownfield development

On 13 February the government published a consultation on planning policy for brownfield development, seeking views on our proposed approach to updating national planning policies related to brownfield land in the National Planning Policy Framework and other topics. View the full [consultation document and take part here](#).

The consultation ends on 26 March 2024. If you have any queries, please contact Paula Fox.

Permitted development rights

On the 13 February the Government launched a consultation on changes to permitted development rights.

The changes include enabling householders to improve and enlarge their homes, 'building upwards' rights, the right allowing the demolition of buildings, changes associated with charging electric vehicles and the right to install air source heat pumps.

To find out more and take part, visit the [consultation website here](#). The consultation closes on 9 April 2024. If you have any queries, please contact Emily Hamerton.

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