

District Councillor Update

July 2025

Cllr Jo Robb, Cllr James Norman

Climate Action Scorecard – SODC in top ten nationally!

In June Climate Emergency UK (CEUK) published its latest league table for local authorities and we were delighted to see that SODC is ranked 5th for district councils taking action to mitigate the impact of Climate Change and to restore Biodiversity. SODC achieved the highest ranking (90%) for Planning and Land Use, reflecting the strong policies proposed as part of the new Joint Local Plan, but also past performance.

Oxfordshire County Council achieved first place in the rankings for County Councils. The full set of Scorecards can be found at <https://councilclimatescorecards.uk/>

Major council IT system migration completed

The work to migrate Council IT systems from Capita to an in-house managed Cloud platform has now been completed. This involved a large number of business-critical systems, including those supporting teams in planning, environmental services, private sector housing, community safety and land charges.

This essential work was required due to the termination of the costly and outdated Capita contract and to provide future-proofing for Council systems irrespective of the future structure of local government. The disruption during this transition period lasted longer than anticipated, and the Councils are grateful to all service users for their forbearance while the work was completed! The Planning system proved to be particularly problematic and it is still facing some integration problems. The Planning Team is now working through a backlog of 500 planning applications and 50 enforcement cases so apologises in advance for any delays in responding to any requests.

Food and Safety Achievements

The Council has published its Food and Workplace Safety achievements during 2024-25. 97.7% of the 1,179 premises they inspected broadly complied with hygiene standards with 658 achieving a 5 star rating. A total of 54 premises were identified as non-broadly compliant and were therefore supported to make improvements. Furthermore, the Environmental Health team dealt with more than 2,400 requests from the public on food safety and hygiene related issues.

Government Planning Reforms

The Government is currently running a number of online consultations on various aspects of the planning system, and the Planning and Infrastructure Bill is currently working its way through Parliament. Local Councils, environmental charities and many MPs have raised serious concerns about the risk to the delivery of truly affordable homes, the rolling-back of many environmental protections and the lack of

measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The Bill as it stands fails to enable councils to purchase land for social housing development without paying substantial premiums, so although more money has been announced for social housing it could end up simply boosting the profits of landowners.

One recent announcement in the Spending Review was the withdrawal of funding to support the development of new Neighbourhood Plans, which risks undermining local engagement in the planning process. NALC has published a statement on this matter: NALC is disappointed at the government's decision to axe funding for neighbourhood planning.

There is much information available online about the proposed Amendments to the Bill and Parish Councils are encouraged to submit comments to the various consultations and to write to MPs to voice concerns.

Local Government Reorganisation

Our public engagement exercise on Local Government Reorganisation is progressing well with our last public event taking place today (4 July) in Thame. At the time of writing, we've had over 1,346 responses to the survey which runs until 16 July.

Please take part in our survey and [encourage others to take part here](#). We're sending reminders out at the moment too.

Further information about our two unitary councils' proposal is available at <https://twocouncils.org>.

Oxford City Council's "Greater Oxford" proposal

Oxford City Council launched its public engagement this week for its alternative proposal, which is to create a [Greater Oxford Council](#). The city's online survey can be found on [Oxford City Council's engagement portal](#).

The city council is going to be holding public drop-in events in our area and we're passing on the details of these events so you can spread the word in your communities to ensure everyone is aware of the proposal and so the city council gets lots of engagement.

South Oxfordshire

- The Merry Bells in Wheatley between 10am and 1pm on 11 July
- The Berin Centre in Berinsfield between 10am and 1pm on 16 July
- Berro Lounge in Didcot between 4pm and 7pm on 29 July

OCC is seeking residents' views too. Details will be found here:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/council/local-government-reorganisation-and-devolution>

Grants News:

Capital grant scheme remains open until 25th July

To support community projects that help improve the quality of life for local people, SODC's Capital Grant Scheme remains open for applications of up to £75,000. Organisations eligible to apply are: Town and parish councils, non-profit businesses and Community Interest Companies, community-based organisations. More details here <https://tinyurl.com/5bvzf28d>

Performing Arts Grant

A new round of the £60,000 Performing Arts grant scheme will open for applications on 28 July. The scheme supports voluntary and community performing arts organisations in South Oxfordshire, who will be able to apply for up to £5,000 in funding for projects that improve community wellbeing across the district.

We are holding a funding advice event at Cornerstone Arts Centre from 4pm – 6pm on Wednesday 9 July. There are limited spaces available, and places must be booked in advance – [please register here](#).

More information can be found on our website southoxon.gov.uk/grants - please help us spread the word!

TOE Nature Recovery Funding

Earlier this month saw the [official opening of the Rycote Meadow footpath](#) in Thame. It is part of the nature recovery work at the meadow and nature reserve, which has been part funded by South's environment fund managed by environmental charity, the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment. [More information on the fund available here](#)

Didcot Gateway Application Approved

The Planning Committee at SODC has approved plans for the redevelopment of the Didcot Gateway site including a new building proposed for use as office space for the council.

The application was delayed due to negotiations with the highways authority about transport to the site.

The proposals for a new building on land owned by the council form part of the long-overdue regeneration of the site opposite Didcot Parkway station. South's proposed building sits alongside development plans from Homes England, both contributing to an overall site masterplan.

The proposed building includes a mix of commercial office space and a public café. The site is currently an unattractive carpark and the scheme, if implemented, will create a positive welcome to Didcot for those arriving in the town.

The cabinet member has given approval for the site to be linked up to the electricity mains (essential for any sort of development in that location), but, with local government reorganisation happening and no clarity yet about the likely shape of any future unitary authority, the scheme will still have to pass commercial viability checks. Having the planning permission in the "back pocket" after long delays is a

benefit, though whether the offices will be required and the scheme implemented is a matter for the future.

Incidentally, another planning application has been submitted by the Councils for a new refuse vehicle depot near Great Haseley -

<https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/haseley-trading-estate/>

Support for Local Businesses

Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Partnership (OSEP) has secured additional funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to provide training and support for small businesses looking to benefit their local communities. Please could you share the link within your local community and local businesses that might benefit from training and peer support: <https://www.osep.org.uk/events/>

Free energy assessments now available to Oxfordshire's small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and community buildings can now access a free energy assessment worth £1,500. Participants will receive a tailored report with recommendations, estimated savings and advice on low-carbon tech like solar panels and heat pumps. Once assessed, they can also apply for up to £10,000 in match funding to help put the plan into action.

<https://www.energysolutionsoxfordshire.org/free-energy-assessment/>