

## **District Councillor Update**

January 2026

Cllr Jo Robb, Cllr James Norman

Happy New Year to all our parishes! We hope you had a restful Christmas break. It was a busy December and there is lots to update you on. As ever, please reach out if you have any questions.

### **Full Council Meeting 11 December**

The last Full Council meeting of the year happened on 11 December. You can read the agenda here:

<https://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=122&MId=3555>

### **New Leader for the Council**

Cllr David Rouane has resigned after 4 years as leader of the Council and the new leader of the Lib Dem administration is Cllr Maggie Phillipova-Rivers. She has been in Cabinet since 2019. The whole council endorsed her nomination at the council meeting on 11th December.

We now have a new chief Executive too, in Adrianna Partridge, whose appointment was also confirmed by all councillors. Adrianna has been deputy leader of the council for many years.

### **Council Tax Helpline**

Parish councils and residents across the district have reported difficulties in “speaking to a person” to get help with council tax and business rates queries. Jo and James have been happy to liaise directly with SODC officers to help residents navigate the system, but call waiting times of 30 minutes are not acceptable.

At Full Council, Jo asked a question of the cabinet member about the performance of Capita and resident satisfaction when it comes to dealing with the council tax/business rates hotline and service. Green councillors will seek to scrutinise this service more closely to ensure that residents, businesses and parish councils are getting a high quality service.

### **Council Tax Enforcement**

Many residents are struggling with the cost of living, and more and more families are experiencing difficulties paying their council tax. Throughout 2024/24, some 2483 liability order debts for council tax arrears were referred to enforcement agents.

At Full Council, Jo asked for detail on the practices of these outsourced enforcement agencies.

Jo has asked the cabinet member to conduct a review of the practices of Capita and its enforcement agents to ensure that our most vulnerable residents are not being unduly impacted by overly punitive arrears recovery practices.

### **Motions:**

Also at the Council meeting, Green councillors Cllr James Barlow and Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye brought a motion on Thames Water's proposed reservoir at Abingdon, asking for an emergency plan to be made ahead of its construction. Currently the plan need only be made *after* the reservoir is constructed and ready to function. The motion was passed unanimously. The leader of the council has now written to the Minister responsible requesting an emergency discharge plan to be made.

A motion from Cllr Snowden (Conservative, Didcot West) on supporting the hospitality industry in the district was also agreed.

### **Waste Vehicles - disappointing decision**

Despite careful and stringent scrutiny by the Joint Scrutiny committee, the Cabinet decided to go ahead with buying a new fleet of waste vehicles powered by fossil fuels. Key among the concerns raised by the Joint Scrutiny Committee were the lack of proper detail on alternatives. Councillors requested that Cabinet ensure that preparations be made in time to enable alternative vehicle types to be meaningfully considered: one of the problems with this decision was that sufficient funds were not allocated in the budget, and the decision was not made early enough to enable any outcome other than "business as usual."

### **Laptop Donation**

Both vale and South District councils donated the older laptops which still work but are no longer usable for South and Vale to SOFEA and Aspire for their 'getting people online' programme and supporting local people. They hoped to get many out in time for Christmas.

### **Bins & Waste**

Please note: from now on you have to be able to SHUT THE LID COMPLETELY on your black bin, or Biffa won't collect it. This is because the bin lifting mechanism on the lorries can't cope with overfilled bins. Any excess can be taken to the Oakley Wood waste centre for disposal. If you have an excess of recyclable waste, please just pop it in a cardboard box or a clear plastic bag and place it out next to your green bin and it will be collected.

## **Fly Tipping**

You have no doubt noticed a lot of fly-tipping on our country verges. Please be sure to report fly tipped waste – our Envirocrime Team will investigate where appropriate and dispose of the waste.

Please call the waste team on 01235 422 123 or email: [admin.southoxford@biffa.co.uk](mailto:admin.southoxford@biffa.co.uk)

## **Joint Local Plan (JLP) Examination**

You may recall that the Local Plan Examiners advised the SODC and Vale of White Horse councils to withdraw their Joint Local Plan from examination because, they said, of a failure in the Duty to Cooperate. A number of councils were in the same boat.

In late November, much to everyone's relief, the government then issued notice that the Duty to Cooperate would be abolished.

In early December, SODC and Vale confirmed to the Inspectors that they intend to resume the Local Plan hearings. The Government intends to remove the Duty to Cooperate early in the new year.

So after a stressful period, the Joint Local Plan appears to be back on track.

## **Oxford Growth Commission Interim report**

Oxford Growth Commissioner Neale Coleman published his Interim Report on 15 December. The report identifies barriers to the growth that the government is determined to “unleash,” and sets out 47 recommendations to improve infrastructure and speed up development. The report still focuses on the requirement for large numbers of homes, despite the fact that private market homes are not solving the housing affordability crisis for those on lower incomes and young people.

The Commission will continue its work through 2026, with a final report expected later, within a year.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/693fe29a33c7ace9c4a42175/Oxford\\_Growth\\_Commission\\_Interim\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/693fe29a33c7ace9c4a42175/Oxford_Growth_Commission_Interim_Report.pdf)

## **Planning Reforms**

The Government has released a raft of new guidance, including details on the forthcoming 30-month process for preparing new-style local plans.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

A draft revised NPPF was published on 16 December 2025 for consultation until 10

March 2026. It aims to create a more rules-based system and accelerate delivery of 1.5 million homes this Parliament. You can see the proposals and give your response here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>

### **Planning Committee News**

While not in our ward, it may be of interest to residents that a proposal for up to 70 new homes on a green field site in Emmer Green (on the former Reading Golf Course, but within South Oxfordshire), was refused by SODC's Planning Committee last month.

The key reasons given by the Committee were that the proposal was contrary to policy including the Kidmore End Neighbourhood Plan, the proposal would erode the rural separation between Kidmore End and Reading, the proposal would cause unacceptable landscape harm, and the site was a green field site not allocated for development in any plan.

Following a motion brought by Cllr James Norman, the Committee voted 5-4 to refuse permission. A key consideration was a letter sent by Matthew Pennycook MP only a week prior, which stated "The plan-led approach is, and must remain, the cornerstone of our planning system."

### **Grants:**

The Councillor Community Grants have closed. Thank you to all who expressed interest and applied. We will be in touch shortly to let you know the outcome.

### **Community Infrastructure Levy Grant**

The second round of funding for the Community Infrastructure Levy Grant Fund will open to Town and Parish councils and not-for-profit community groups in South Oxfordshire shortly.

A total of **£750,000** is being offered to support projects that improve or create new community amenities such as community centres, sports and cultural facilities, play areas, and open spaces.

Grants between £75,000 and £250,000 will be available for organisations to apply for to support projects in the district which are needed due to development in the area.

Please get in touch if you have a major project you are looking to fund – the CIL Levy Grant could be the way forward for you!