

District Councillor Report
Haseley Brook ward
04 September 2024

Cllr Georgina Heritage



My Meetings and Activity

Since we last met in July, there has been a full council meeting in which I seconded a proposal to accept the Department for Levelling Up's grant of £840,000 for Local Authority Housing Fund 3 allocation (LAHF 3), in order to purchase four homes for people in need under this scheme. Council was unanimously in favour, as it was to award section 106 grant funding of £940,000 to SOHA towards provision of 31 affordable homes in Thame (this contribution to fund the zero carbon element of the properties).

On 22nd July I attended the Climate and Ecological Emergency committee meeting and, while August was a busy month for my cabinet portfolio, there were no full council meetings to attend. On a local level I was pleased to attend the Lewknor parish residents' meeting which was called to discuss the proposed Lewknor & Postcombe solar farm.

As part of my cabinet work, I met the Better Leisure manager at Wallingford Riverside recently and was impressed by the hard work and dedication that's gone into the venue for this season, especially as it was flooded earlier this year and there were doubts it could be opened in time. I know that residents all over South Oxon enjoy the pool and splash park, so it's great that the season has been extended by one week, meaning the facilities will close on 8th September. As I write this report, I'm awaiting social media confirmation of a special dog swim session for the final evening of the pool season. A similar announcement in Abingdon has been met with huge support, so it's fantastic that our own outdoor pool in South Oxon will be hosting such an event. If your dog might enjoy a sociable swim with other dogs on the evening of the 8th, do look out for the social media announcement!

In August I also took the opportunity to visit Thomley in Worminghall, the education and activity centre for disabled people. I was hugely inspired and motivated by this very special and important charity and was blown away by the exceptional care and facilities that benefit so many families in South Oxfordshire.

The next steps for our Joint Local Plan

Following two hugely successful public consultations, which saw the councils (South and Vale) receiving a Highly Commended award at the Planning Resource Awards 2024, we're pleased to set out the next steps for our Joint Local Plan (JLP).

Over the past three years, we've been working positively on a plan that meets the needs for homes and infrastructure for our communities and delivers on our commitment to tackling the climate emergency and recovery of nature. We've had a hugely positive response from our communities and local businesses to our proposals and we're nearly ready to submit our plan to be examined – in fact we anticipate being ready to submit in December 2024, four months earlier than we previously thought.

Updated Local Development Scheme

In line with the delegation from Full Council meetings in March 2021, officers have therefore updated a document known as our Local Development Scheme that sets out the timetable we will follow for this work, which is now published: [South LDS](#)

Joint Local Plan timeline

The JLP is one of the most important documents we deliver as councils and has a lasting impact on our communities. The JLP is fundamental to achieving many of the councils' strategic ambitions and as such we are now striving to submit it as soon as possible as we recognise the importance of ensuring that development is plan-led.

In a few weeks, we'll be publishing our proposed JLP, along with the relevant supporting documents and the evidence we've based the plan on. The public will have a 6-week opportunity to let us know if they think the plan meets all the relevant requirements. This stage of the process is a very technical one and any comments on the 'soundness' of the plan will be sent with the plan on to the government-appointed Planning Inspector. It is not intended to be 'consultation' in the traditional sense of the word.

More details on this final publication stage will follow soon, in the meantime we'd like to thank everyone who has taken the time over the past three years to take part in this process and give us their thoughts on what matters to them, and their views and opinions on our proposals.

Corporate Plan timelines

As part of submitting our JLP earlier than originally anticipated, and ensuring we also respond to the government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation, it will be necessary to focus staffing resources on this vital project. We have also been in the process of developing our new corporate plans for both councils. Whilst developing our two corporate plans remains important, the timeframe on the delivery of the final plans is now likely to extend into early 2025 and will therefore be able to better align with the budget setting of both councils, whilst officers channel their efforts into the large scale task of finalising the JLP.

National Planning Policy Framework consultation

Considering the new government's housing plans, we are working on providing a full and thorough response to its consultation on proposed revisions to the NPPF by 24th September 2024.

Officers firmly believe our work on the JLP delivers for our local communities in districts which have already seen significant development. Evidence shows that the JLP strikes the right level of development for both districts, as shown by the overwhelming support it has received as part of our two successful public consultations. We have prioritised affordable housing, protecting our countryside and climate action. We're delivering a plan that truly represents our community.

As such, staff resource is currently focused on the JLP, but we will ensure that we provide further information on the NPPF consultation in due course. The Government has raised more than 100 questions that they are seeking responses on. You can view the [consultation document here](#).

The JLP is based on the Standard Method, a government model that provides a starting point for housing requirement in an area. Within the NPPF consultation, the Government has proposed a new standard method that would increase Vale's housing target by 304 per annum, and South Oxfordshire's target by 600 per annum. You can view [draft revised standard method numbers](#) on the government's website (see table titled [Outcome of the proposed revised method](#)). As widely trailed in the press, there is an increased focus in the consultation version of the NPPF on the release of Green Belt in areas where this is required to achieve delivery of the revised standard method.

Within the consultation, the Government has effectively indicated that all local plans that are not submitted for examination within one month of the publication of a new NPPF must be redone in line with the revised NPPF and the new standard method. Whilst officers are still reviewing the consultation document, at this time there are no obvious beneficial proposals that go above or beyond the policies we have consulted on at Regulation 18 stage of the JLP.

Funding available for community projects in South Oxfordshire

Community groups in South Oxfordshire are invited to apply for funding in the new round of Community Grants, which opened on 14th August. Each South Oxfordshire District councillor has a budget of £5,000 which they can award to projects in their ward.

Those eligible to apply include town councils, parish councils, parish meetings, not for profit preschools and PTAs and local not for profit organisations.

The minimum grant that can be applied for is £250 and the maximum is £5,000 for each councillor. Applicants can apply to a maximum of five wards.

Applicants are asked to consider the Council's key priorities and how their projects would support them. For example: "Protect and restore our natural world and improve economic and community wellbeing".

The deadline for applications is **midday Friday 29 November 2024**.

There are more details about who is eligible to apply, what kind of projects can be funded and the decision process on [the grants pages of the South Oxfordshire District Council website](#) or organisations can contact the Community Enablement team grants@southandvale.gov.uk.

If you have a community project in mind that might be eligible for a councillor grant, do get in touch with me.

Revenue Grant Scheme - to help support communities in South Oxfordshire

A new round of the Revenue grant scheme is now open. The Revenue Grant Scheme, run by SODC, aims to help voluntary and community organisations build and support thriving communities and improve the quality of life of people across South Oxfordshire.

The council offers in principle funding for two years and has a provisional budget of £667,992 to allocate. This is subject to annual approval by the council when setting its budget.

As well as covering essential operational costs, this funding can also be used to help voluntary sector organisations become more financially sustainable and have a long-lasting impact in the communities they support. For example, organisations may consider using this funding to support training staff in new skills or to invest in new income streams to help diversify their fundraising.

Organisations can apply for a minimum grant of £10,000 and a maximum grant of £125,000 per annum over the two-year period.

The services and activities must be able to demonstrate direct benefits to meet a clearly identified need for South Oxfordshire residents. They must contribute towards at least one of the council's externally focussed emerging Corporate Plan priorities.

- Action on climate change and nature recovery
- Inclusion, accessibility and accountability
- Thriving and healthy communities
- Homes and infrastructure that meet local need

The closing date for applications is **midday 1 November 2024**.

Councils purchase 45 Homes for people in need

A new era for genuinely affordable, high-quality, council-owned housing has begun in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse. It is over 20 years since the last council houses were sold in the districts, and house prices and rents have since spiralled. Now South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are tackling the problem head-on.

The first of 45 homes being purchased and refurbished for those in the highest level of housing need are now ready for people to move in as phase one of the councils' drive to become long-term social landlords for local residents.

Once purchases are completed on the homes (27 in South Oxfordshire, 18 in the Vale) they are then renovated and furnished ready to become a stable home for as long as people need them.

This move has been largely funded by immediately available grants that are intended to initially support those in high housing need, including families fleeing conflict in places such as Ukraine and Afghanistan, and can then be used to support long-term housing need in the local community.

In the longer-term, these properties will support the councils' Housing Delivery Strategy to provide access to suitable, affordable homes for local people. This will help the councils address a long-term issue of the availability of affordable housing for people in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse – which are expensive places to rent or buy on the open market.

You can view a video of one of the new homes here:

- [South Oxfordshire Housing](#)

SODC joins UK100

SODC's ambitious plans to tackle climate change and reduce carbon emissions took a step forward after the council joined UK100 – the network of local authorities committed to taking progressive climate action. Members of UK100 share best practice and details of successful projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move towards net zero.

The council is determined in its plans to tackle climate change and has already made great strides, as it...

- buys electricity for its buildings (such as council offices and its arts centre) that is from 100 per cent renewable energy sources;
- has a programme of installing solar panels and air source heat pumps at its leisure centres in Didcot, Thame and Wheatley and its arts centre, Cornerstone, enabled by various funding sources including the council's budget, the government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and Swimming Pool Support Fund;
- has had 62 EV chargers installed at its car parks;
- has ordered an electric food truck for the waste collections fleet;
- has given grants for many community climate projects through its [grants programme](#);
- has lobbied government for climate change action;
- has supported cultural organisations with their climate change ambitions by supporting Green Arts Oxfordshire and its carbon literacy training programme.