

District Councillor Report
Haseley Brook ward
06 January 2025

Cllr Georgina Heritage



Meetings and Council Activity

- ❖ The Community Grants panel sat on 12th December to consider Capital Grant applications, and I'm delighted that Lewknor parish council were successful in their application to help fund solar panels for the village hall. I'm very much looking forward to seeing the project progress over the coming year.
- ❖ As mentioned in my previous report, I chaired the PCC and Chief Constable annual report in December and, following comments from parish councils, I also raised the question of regular reporting to towns and parishes. Most parish councils list a TVP report in the monthly agenda, but apparently they haven't seen one for approximately five years.

The advice given in answer to my question was that parish councils should register on "Thames Valley Alerts" for up-to-date information: [Home Page - Thames Valley Alert](#) . However it was also accepted that a proactive approach by TVP of advising parish/town councils of this, rather than simply ceasing monthly reports, would be appreciated by towns and villages in the South & Vale districts.

- ❖ At the parish meetings I attended last month I mentioned that **SODC's 5 Year Land Supply** position has improved, however the information didn't arrive in time for my previous report. For clarity, our position is now 4.62 years... or 5.59 according to the new Joint Local Plan with Vale, which was submitted to the Secretary of State on 10th December (more details on this below). For South currently, we are being measured against a four year target as we have undertaken a local plan consultation containing housing requirement and site allocations. This could change as a result of housing targets and changes in the new NPPF and, for reference, I'm including some NPPF key points at the end of this report.
- ❖ The other huge local government matter, which is now a priority concern for councils throughout the country, has come in the form of the White Paper on **Devolution**. The following points might be helpful in summarising what we know currently:
 - District councils will be abolished and replaced by Unitary Authorities which take on the duties of both County and District.

- The Government target is for unitaries to cover a population of around 500,000. Oxfordshire has a population of 720,000 so has a decision to make. Is it too big for one or too small for two?
- These unitaries will be overseen by a Combined Authority and an elected mayor covering a population of about 1.5M.
- We are likely to align with an existing statutory authority footprint, perhaps TVP or ICB BOB (NHS).
- If we are in the first wave it will probably take around two years.
- There are advantages to going early in terms of certainty and stability for services and staff.

SODC's Leader Cllr David Rouane has written to Cllr Liz Leffman, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, asking her to make formal contact with the Government as soon as possible to express a strong view for Oxfordshire to move forward quickly with local government reorganisation.

In his letter, sent in the days following the publication of a Government White Paper on English Devolution, Cllr David Rouane set out that it was not in the interests of South Oxfordshire to have a prolonged period of debate on the matter within the public sector.

He explained that "the Government has already decided that local government reorganisation is going to happen. Delay will only bring uncertainty for residents and local businesses who depend on our services, and for our staff who will be worried about their own futures. We owe it to everyone to move to a more stable position as soon as possible."

This letter is available on the council's [official correspondence page](#) on its website.

- ❖ On a lighter note, as part of my cabinet work, I was pleased to be involved in December's staff day for GLL/Better Leisure, the organisation that manages South & Vale's leisure facilities. While we don't have leisure centres in Haseley Brook, I know many residents use the centre in Thame and visit the Riverside open air pool and splash park in Wallingford. The day involved staff awards, and there were some incredibly worthy winners amongst this dedicated team, including a young member of staff who saved a life using CPR. For those of you who frequent the Riverside, you may recognise Harrison in the second photo below, who is known for going above and beyond in customer service. It was lovely to see him rewarded for his work ethic and attitude, and equally lovely to see that the team at our most local leisure centre in Thame were recognised with the South Oxfordshire Facility Award.



New Performing Arts Grant

Community organisations working in the arts in South Oxfordshire will benefit from a new grant launching in February...

On 28th November, SODC Cabinet members approved our new Performing Arts Grant, which will open on 3 February 2025 to voluntary and community 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.

The grant scheme aims to enhance the cultural landscape of South Oxfordshire by providing a financial boost to projects that help improve the quality of life of people living in the district, through projects that have a significant impact on the community.

As Cabinet member for Communities I'm very excited about the approval of the new Performing Arts Grant and would like to encourage all eligible voluntary and community organisations to apply when applications open.

Applicants must show how their projects meet the following community values and priorities, fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable performing arts scene in South Oxfordshire:

- Increase the range of arts opportunities available to local communities.
- Support inclusive practice and celebrate diversity
- Develop local artistic talent
- Promote innovation and excellence
- Develop new audiences and participants in performing arts initiatives

Organisations eligible to apply are:

- Non-for-profit groups, arts, or community groups
- Town and parish councils
- Schools (for non-core curriculum activities)

More details about the grant along with information about the launch event and drop-in events across the district will be made available soon on the council's website southoxon.gov.uk/grants and organisations can contact the Community Arts team performingartsgrants@southandvale.gov.uk for support when the grant is open.

Notice of Submission of Joint Local Plan 2041 to the Secretary of State

A plan for the future in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse took a major step forward on 10th December 2024. The two district councils have been working together to produce a Joint Local Plan (JLP), which aims to help meet their local communities' need for affordable housing, jobs and infrastructure while tackling the climate emergency.

Following a series of successful public consultations, which produced strong and positive feedback, the plan has now been submitted to the Government for the examination stage.

The Planning Inspectorate will examine the JLP and assess whether it has been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements.

At the end of the public examination, the Inspector will conclude whether or not the plan is sound. In most cases the Inspector's report will recommend some changes that would allow the plan to be adopted.

If successfully adopted, the plan would replace the existing Local Plans for both councils.

In the new draft Joint Local Plan, the councils have shown that there are enough new homes in the pipeline already. This means that there is no need to build on any extra new greenfield sites over the next 15 years, beyond what has already been allocated. Only one area of expansion has been earmarked, which is on the brownfield land owned by the Ministry of Defence at Dalton Barracks near Abingdon.

Crucially, the plan also sets out new firmer environment policies so that development is net zero carbon and delivers twice the national level of biodiversity net gain to help with the recovery of nature.

New NPPF

The updated **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** has been published following the Government's consultation. Below are some key points, and you can access the full document here: [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

Key points:

The Government has re-committed to its promise to build **1.5 million new homes** over the course of this Parliament.

- The total annual **national housing target** has been raised from **300,000 to 370,000**.
- Housebuilding would increase by **more than 60%** under the new targets compared to recent levels of building.
- **Mandatory housing targets** will require local authorities to use the standard method as the basis for determining housing requirements in their local plans.
- A "modernised, strategic approach to Green Belt land designation and release" will require local authorities to use the local plan process to adopt a "**sequential approach**" considering brownfield, then grey belt and then higher performing land.
- **"Grey belt" has been defined for the first time** = land in the green belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143.
 - Those purposes are:
 - a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
 - b) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
 - d) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
- **Green belt developments will have more affordable housing:** "a) be set at a higher level than that which would otherwise apply to land which is not within or proposed to be released from the Green Belt; and b) require at least 50% of the housing to be affordable, unless this would make the development of these sites unviable (when tested in accordance with national planning practice guidance on viability)."
- New "**golden rules**" will introduce a 15% premium on top of existing **affordable housing** requirements, up to a maximum of 50 percent. This differs from the proposed 50% requirement proposed prior to the consultation and has been justified by saying that it may make developments unviable in high-cost areas.