

District Councillor Report  
Haseley Brook ward  
07 July 2025



Cllr Georgina Heritage

**What I've been doing - Meetings and Council Activity**

- Represented residents at planning committee meetings regarding two Stadhampton planning applications I called in to committee (P24/S3902/FUL and P25/S0643/O).
- Registered a planning committee call-in for the Lewknor planning application P25/S1430/O for 25 houses on the land off Watlington Road.
- Attended the Oxfordshire Food Summit, which included launching South and Vale's Food Action Plan. This endorses Oxfordshire Food Strategy which aims to create a healthy, sustainable and affordable food system for everyone in Oxfordshire. More details about this can be found here: [The Oxfordshire Food Strategy - South Oxfordshire District Council](#)
- Sat on the Police & Crime Committee in Aylesbury, a cross council scrutiny committee of work of the Thames Valley police & crime commissioner.
- Presented awards to South Oxfordshire athletes at the inspirational GLL Sports Foundation Awards. GLL is the council's leisure partner, and it was a privilege to be part of this event. I met some truly inspirational athletes from our district, including gold medal winning Paralympian rower Giedre Rakauskaite MBE. Giedre has benefitted from the foundation herself and took part in a Q&A with the audience. I also learned at this event that our local leisure centre in Thame had just achieved an interim score of 'Excellence' in their unannounced visit by Quest (the leisure industries equivalent of a national benchmarking service), which is fantastic news for both staff and users of the facility.
- Attended and presented at South and Vale's Cultural Heritage Networking Event at the abbey in Abingdon. We hosted local museums, cultural organisations and heritage sites across the districts, and heard from key organisations like the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Oxfordshire County Council, Museums Development Trust and Arts Council England. We're looking forward to introducing our new Culture, Heritage and Creative Industries Strategy which is a long-term plan to strengthen and grow arts, culture and heritage across the districts. There's more info further on in this report about the strategy.
- Responded to residents' and parish councils' requests for assistance on matters of planning applications, housing need and waste services.
- BBC radio interview about Cornerstone arts centre; That's TV interviews about Cultural & Heritage strategy and leisure centre decarbonisation

**IT Systems downtime**

Following the planned IT downtime which allowed the council to move systems away from Capita and onto servers managed in-house, we have experienced various technical and teething issues over

the last few weeks. This included impacts on customers using the website mapping (GIS) and links to applications. SODC are doing everything they can to fix the issues and are now embarking on the “catch-up” phase to work through the backlog that built up when they were unable to process planning and building control applications. Although Building Control has made significant progress, planning is more challenging.

The council has temporarily **suspended pre-application planning advice** service to help expand the team’s capacity to work on recovery. The position will be reviewed at the beginning of August.

Parish councils will be updated throughout, as the council is aware that they have experienced impacts from viewing the website and commenting on applications, and SODC apologises for this disruption.

### **Planning application submitted for Haseley Trading Estate vehicle depot**

SODC has now submitted a planning application for the proposed vehicle depot site, and the plans are now available to view online and for people to leave their comments.

The full plans can be viewed

here: <https://data.southoxon.gov.uk/ccm/support/Main.jsp?MODULE=ApplicationDetails&REF=P25/S1653/FUL>

The planning application is to redevelop and retain one of the existing buildings, and site improvements such as adding solar panels on the existing building, improving the screening with planting and managing the adjoining woodland.

Statutory consultees such as Oxfordshire County Council (including Highways’ response) and Thames Water Development Control have not yet responded at the time of writing this report.

The district council’s Planning department will determine the planning application. As such, the council has been observing strict and careful internal procedures to ensure the Planning officers involved in reviewing the application are independent from council staff working on the project.

The application will ultimately be debated and determined in a public meeting of the council’s politically representative Planning committee. The comments made during the planning application consultation will be presented as part of the report being considered at that committee meeting and there will be an opportunity for public speaking at the committee meeting.

### **Didcot Gateway**

The application for the proposed Didcot Gateway development was heard at SODC’s planning committee on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, where members voted in favour of the development.

This is the application for proposed council office accommodation at Station Road Car Park, Didcot.

#### **Why is the application still going ahead in light of LGR?**

The full planning application was submitted to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) in August 2023.

The planning process has taken longer than originally anticipated for a number of reasons, including prolonged and complex negotiations with statutory consultees.

It was submitted before the government published its Devolution White Paper and subsequent Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) plans.

Whilst LGR has significant implications for decision making and investment in some council projects, including this scheme, progressing the planning application is still the most appropriate course of action in any scenario as it will enable the council to future proof options for the site.

Once in place in 2027, the shadow authority would have the opportunity to decide on the delivery strategy for the site, to meet the new authority's requirements.

### **Didcot Gateway Regeneration Masterplan**

The development is part of the wider masterplan for regeneration of this area of Didcot as prepared with Homes England (HE) and Soha in accordance with planning policy.

Work is also underway to install a power supply on the site, subject to securing the necessary permissions, to enable any potential future development options at the site and address a shortage of electricity network capacity in the Didcot area.

### **Leisure Centre Decarbonisation**

Multi-million-pound plans have been approved to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions at two South Oxfordshire leisure centres in Berinsfield and Henley.

SODC was successful in its bid for government funding of around £1.5m towards installing energy efficiency measures including double glazing and insulation, as well as solar panels and air source heat pumps to replace end-of-life gas boilers at the leisure centres.

The owner of the buildings, Oxfordshire County Council, will put in £2m towards the improvements, while SODC will fund a further £2.8m from developer contributions. All work should be finished by the end of March 2028.

Abbey Sports Centre in Berinsfield was built in 1959 as a school, before being converted to a leisure centre in the 1980s. Because of the age of the building, the roof insulation is well below current standards and the centre will benefit from extensive roof renovation to minimise heat loss. Plans also include replacing gas heating with air source heat pumps, adding double glazing, insulating the squash court walls and installing solar panels on the roof. It is projected that the new measures will mean a 75 per cent saving in energy kWh (gas and electricity).

Built in the 1970s, Henley Leisure Centre has some elderly heating plant – two of the boilers set to be replaced are estimated to be between 22 and 25 years old. Even though the centre is shaded by trees it will still benefit from solar panels. In addition, the council will install air source heat pumps and roof insulation. It is projected that these three measures will bring a 59 per cent saving in energy kWh (gas and electricity).

The funding for the decarbonisation work has been provided from Phase 4 of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme which is delivered by Salix Finance on behalf of the government. The scheme is run by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. It is aimed at tackling emissions from heating public sector buildings, aid a green recovery and support the UK's 2050 net zero target and clean growth goals.

## **Cornerstone Arts Centre at the heart of a new culture strategy for South Oxfordshire**

Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot is at the heart of efforts to improve the cultural and performing arts offer to our communities. Over the past year, the centre has seen more community groups adopt the centre as their location for monthly meet ups, seen sell out shows such as The Zoots, Primary School Assembly Bangers, Spires and Boden, Shaparak Khorsandi, and is looking forward to welcoming Bill Bailey this September (sold out of course)! Plus the introduction of the first pantomime at the centre in December, Cinderella, which saw new audiences coming to Cornerstone for the first time.

Off the back of the success of Cinderella, the Council is now working on a long term contract with a pantomime company so that Cornerstone Arts Centre can be the go to panto venue for families each year.

A year after it announced its plans to introduce an 18-month action plan to secure its future, Cornerstone is now ready to move into the next phase after a successful year.

SODC councillors approved the new phase in the Cabinet meeting in June, which will also see the adoption of a pathway to a new Culture, Heritage and Creative Industries (CHCI) Strategy for the district as a whole, which will be adopted in summer 2026.

In February 2024 Councillors approved the first phase of the plans, with a vision for Cornerstone to maximise its community benefit and financial efficiency, and to establish its long-term sustainability.

Some of the improvements already planned for the next year, as part of a second phase, include:

- A food and beverage review to be undertaken for the Café at Cornerstone
- CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) of £405,000 will be used at the centre to improve the outdoor social area, Box Office, toilet facilities, and give the auditoriums sound and lighting an upgrade
- Decarbonisation funding awarded to South Oxfordshire District Council by the government will be used to install air source heat pumps and solar panels early next year, which will help reduce the centre's carbon footprint

As Cabinet Member for Communities, I'm really proud that SODC runs a venue like Cornerstone, with something for all ages to enjoy. Over the last year the team at the centre have worked hard to introduce even more to their programme and engage with their visitors to find out what they want to see at the centre.

The second phase of the action plan will see SODC work alongside Vale of White Horse District Council on the development of the Culture, Heritage and Creative Industries (CHCI) Strategy, which it is hoped will also support economic growth in the districts linked to the STEAM agenda, skills and learning, destination management and the visitor economy and support employment in creative industries.

The Strategy will put Cornerstone at the heart of arts and culture in the district and look ahead to 2026-2030. It will focus on the operation improvement of Cornerstone Arts Centre, providing a valuable public service of entertainment, skills and learning, health and wellbeing and community cohesion.

The CHCI will see the council working with key partners such as the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport, Arts Council England (ACE), Oxfordshire County Council, National Lottery Heritage Fund to improve arts and culture accessibility and experiences across the district.

With the second phase of work the council will continue its aim to reduce revenue and increase the value of Cornerstone as the go to arts venue in the area and its importance to the community.

## **Grants**

The Capital grant scheme is open until 25<sup>th</sup> July, and the Performing Arts grant will open on 28<sup>th</sup> July. More details about SODC's grant schemes can be found here: [Community Grants for 2025/26 - South Oxfordshire District Council](#)