

District Councillor Report
Haseley Brook ward
05 February 2025

Cllr Georgina Heritage



Local Government Reorganisation

As I write this report, there has been no update from Government on Oxfordshire's position. However I thought it would be helpful for parish councils to be aware of the preferred direction of our Council Leader Cllr David Rouane, who is working closely on this matter and involved in daily meetings and discussions in the interests of South Oxfordshire residents. His Leader's Update issued on 24th January is as follows (and a press release was issued to summarise the same):

"Following the publication of its White Paper before Christmas, the government asked upper tier authorities (the County Council in our case) to respond with their views on the nature and pace of change. With this in mind, their cabinet met on 9 January and I, along with the leaders of the other district councils, took the opportunity to set out our view.

The full meeting can be watched [via the Oxfordshire County Council \(OCC\) website](#) but the points which I made were:

- that we should act quickly in order to give residents and businesses confidence that we will continue to deliver excellent services, and;
- that there was a broad consensus that the footprint of the Strategic Authority should be guided by existing institutions such as the Thames Valley Police or the integrated care board area (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire & Berkshire West) and that we should make this preference known to government.

Given that this is a decision for OCC, as the 'upper tier' authority, I had intended to leave my comments there. However, since then, Oxford City Council has written to the minister expressing a different (minority) view and the leader of Swindon [has written in their local newspaper](#) about their preference to join a Mayoral Strategic Authority with Oxfordshire and others.

It is my view that we should be looking to work together in a Strategic Authority with those councils in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire who wish to join with us. This is because: these areas all have vibrant economies which will contribute to the sustainable growth which the government is looking for, we have a record of working together in the police and health authorities, we have a shared identity as part of the South East Region, and we have historical connections in that much of South Oxfordshire was in Berkshire prior to the previous local government reorganisation.

As I reported to the December Council meeting, “At the invitation of the Leader of Swindon Borough Council, I joined other council leaders from Oxfordshire and Berkshire to discuss the potential shape of any new Combined Authority, and specifically whether Swindon should be included in any submission made by us.

After listening to the arguments, I have written to the participants to say that I do not support this idea. The reasons for this were that Swindon does not meet the conditions which I have set out above for joining together: They are in different health and police geographies, their long-term identity is one of being the ‘Gateway to the West Country’ not part of the South East, we have no historical ties, and they are at a very different stage in the economic cycle.

OCC sent their letter and are expecting a reply next week, although government responses don’t always run to time, and Oxford City Council have invited council leaders to a meeting on 31 January to discuss this ever-moving picture. I would prefer that OCC made their position clear on a preferred geography as soon as possible and have asked their Leader to do so”.

NPPF and Joint Local Plan Update

In mid-January officers ran a planning training session to update councillors on local and national policy. The update covered the new National Planning Policy Framework (Dec 2024), what’s on the planning horizon from government for 2025, and the proposed AI growth zone at Culham, although things are moving fast in the planning world so did not cover more recent announcements like the revival of the Ox-Cam Arc.

There was good news on the Joint Local Plan, which was submitted for independent examination on time in December, with Inspectors Bust and Mulloy appointed at the end of December. By completing and submitting the Joint Local Plan to an accelerated timetable, under transition arrangements it will be tested against the previous housing numbers and the government planning policies set in the NPPF 2023, rather than the new (higher) housing numbers and new policies of the new NPPF 2024.

At the moment when making decisions on planning applications, appeals and enforcement, the adopted local plans and made neighbourhood plans form the development plan, and the emerging Joint Local Plan policies hold limited weight during the examination period (or moderate weight in the case of a minority of policies which attracted little or no objection).

Although the Joint Local Plan will not be required to meet the new higher housing numbers, and once adopted the housing numbers will be pinned to those in the Joint Local Plan for five years, the new NPPF requires us, straight away, to calculate housing land supply differently. A key change is that all authorities must now demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, regardless the age of their local plan. This reversed the changes in the previous NPPF, which had withdrawn the 5 year land supply test for councils where their plan was less than five years old – as is the case in South Oxfordshire. Furthermore, the new NPPF removed a lower, 4 year test for councils who did have to demonstrate a 5 year supply where that council had consulted on a new plan with housing targets and allocations – as is the case in South Oxfordshire with the JLP. Finally, the NPPF requires that all authorities add a

5% buffer on top of the housing requirement, which raises the bar further still. Under the new calculations, South Oxfordshire has a land supply of 4.5 years.

However, it's important to note that in the NPPF there is some protection for areas with a neighbourhood plan that is less than 5 years old and which contains housing policies and housing allocations. Officers anticipate extra interest in neighbourhood planning, and now is a very good time for town and parish councils to produce a neighbourhood plan, or update one in a neighbourhood plan review. For those parishes without a plan, please contact the neighbourhood planning team for help and advice via planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk.

Garden waste service changes in South and Vale

Residents who use the garden waste service in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts will have a change to their service subscriptions this year.

Each year, the two districts combined collect around 25,500 tonnes of garden waste, and a change to how the popular service is paid for is coming this spring to improve the efficiency of the subscription process for residents.

South and Vale District Councils are introducing a permit scheme from April 2025 that will involve customers receiving a sticker permit for their bins to identify them as fully paid-up garden waste customers. This kind of scheme is offered successfully by many other local authorities, including in neighbouring West Oxfordshire.

As this is a change to how the garden waste service is managed, there are actions subscribers will need to take to continue receiving garden waste collections. The new permit payment system opens towards the end of February.

When the new system goes live, all existing customers will be invited to subscribe to the service. Existing customers will be notified directly, with full information on the council websites and each house getting a bin hanger flagging the changes.

Customers will then need to make an annual payment for a permit – this replaces the existing direct debit scheme. Everyone's payment year will run from 1 April to 31 March each year.

When customers sign up they will be sent a garden waste permit sticker to put on the top of the lid of their brown bin. Each bin needs its own permit and all customers will receive a new sticker annually each time they renew.

The permits will help the waste collection crews identify which bins should be emptied. This will ensure that only households that have paid for the service have their garden waste bins emptied and the changes are part of the councils' ongoing work to improve the efficiency and value of public services.

Benefits to customers include a new online system so they can manage their account and change their details much more easily. This will also mean the councils can contact people quickly if there are any major disruptions to the service, such as during adverse weather. When customers pay for a permit, there will be a link to sign up for an account and the account sign up is also available on the councils' websites.

