

District Councillor Report
Haseley Brook ward
03 October 2024



Cllr Georgina Heritage

My Meetings and Activity

Unsurprisingly, I (and my councillor colleagues) received many calls and emails recently about flood concerns, following the heavy rainfall. Several parts of south Oxon were severely affected. I know there are parish councils and community organisations looking to work together on flood mitigation projects, which is something I very much support. In the meantime however, I'd like to remind residents and businesses to refer to [the Oxfordshire Flood Toolkit](#) where they can read about preventative measures they can take and where they can use the [reporting form on the toolkit](#), should their home or business become flooded. The County Council's [Help I'm Flooding page](#) for more information on what to do in the event of a flood.

Oxfordshire County Council leads the flood response activities in our area, and SODC provides a supporting role across a range of areas. We also have a Flood Advice webpage - [South](#) - which can direct members of the public to the relevant authorities' websites.

In other matters we have positive news about housing and development in our area: I was pleased to be attend a Cabinet and Full Council meeting on 19th September regarding the next step for our groundbreaking, ambitious and innovative Joint Local Plan. Robustly evidence-based, this plan will raise development standards in our districts. Council members at SODC (as well as those at Vale) gave the go-ahead for the Plan to be published for comment for a six week period, and then submitted for independent examination by a Planning Inspector. The draft plan has been developed between the two councils to help meet local community future need for housing, jobs and infrastructure, and will replace the districts' current adopted plans. Here are some more details about the Joint Local Plan:

Joint Local Plan Progress

The councils have identified that there are enough new homes in the pipeline already, with no need to build on any extra new greenfield sites over the next 15 years. 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.

There are also new policies and maps identifying parts of the districts which are valued landscapes or have dark skies or are especially prized for their tranquillity. To help more people who need an affordable home, the proportion of affordable housing on large sites will also go up from 35% to 40%

in Vale of White Horse and from 40% to 50% in South Oxfordshire, without increasing the total number of homes being built.

Council officers have been working hard to get the plan just right using the feedback received during two hugely positive consultations the councils ran during its development. The plan is at a very advanced stage of its development and is another step closer to being submitted for examination, earlier than anticipated.

We are very proud of this plan, not least because it will help us protect and restore nature with ambitious biodiversity net gain requirements. We know from evidence-gathering that this is achievable and viable. It also takes an evidence-based approach to housing need - it recognises that people need a place to live, but it focuses on affordability and sustainability.

There is now a 6-week opportunity to comment on whether the plan meets all the relevant requirements to ensure it is sound and legally compliant, which is a technical and formal process. To review and comment on the Plan's soundness and legal compliance and whether it meets the duty to co-operate, go to www.southandvale.gov.uk/jlp. This will be live until 12th November.

Residents are welcome to check the council's Joint Local Plan webpage ([South JLP](#)) for updates, or sign up for planning notifications.

Funding for Nature Recovery

SODC has released a further £50,000 to provide grants for projects which increase biodiversity and encourage public access to green spaces in the district following the success of the scheme over its first 12 months.

In September 2023 the council set up a new partnership with the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE), to give £50,000 as grants through TOE's Local Environment Fund to help boost local nature recovery efforts and reduce the impacts of climate change.

Over the past year the money has been awarded to a variety of organisations including parish councils and environmental charities in Thame, Wheatley, East Hagbourne, Little Wittenham, Benson and Chalgrove.

The projects have ranged from the creation of ponds and butterfly banks to providing protective fencing for a meadow conservation area and boardwalk improvement to allow managed public access to a wetland habitat.

Community groups, town and parish councils, charities and non-profit organisations are invited to apply to TOE for funding to support projects which help look after South Oxfordshire's green spaces.

The grants, that range from £1,000 and £15,000, can be used for tree and hedgerow planting or restoring community orchards, ponds, and nature-rich meadows. They could also be used to improve access to the countryside and green spaces, for example by replacing stiles with gates for better accessibility and improving pathways.

The fund uses money from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) paid by developer contributions.

Early applications are encouraged, so any South Oxon-based group involved in protecting and restoring their local environment should contact TOE to find out more.

Council's carbon emissions and Net Zero update

South Oxfordshire District Council has made strong and positive progress in its goal to achieve net zero and has nearly halved its carbon emissions since 2009/10.

The council has a programme to improve insulation and installing technology such as solar panels and air source heat pumps at arts and leisure centres, with projects in Didcot, Thame and Wheatley underway. The council's leisure and arts teams have received funding from the government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and Swimming Pool Support Fund to help with this work. The council is also exploring similar plans for Henley and Berinsfield.

The council's waste team has also purchased its first electric food waste truck which the crews will begin using this autumn. In addition, up to six other council vans are also expected to transition to electric vehicles in the next year, with two already on the road.

In 2019, the council set itself a highly ambitious target of becoming a carbon neutral by 2025 and also set an aspirational target of South Oxfordshire being a net zero carbon district by 2030.

Our council leader Cllr David Rouane has the following message:

"We knew that there could be challenges to achieving our net zero targets both for the council and for the district. For the council we had anticipated that technology – especially regarding larger electric refuse vehicles - would have developed faster than it has proved. The rural nature of the district with its long waste collection routes has proved a struggle for larger electric vehicles. However, the council has a ten-week trial of an electric refuse collection vehicle planned in the coming months and we are hopeful of favourable results.

"Barriers for the district to reach net zero include the previous government's chop and change policy regarding funding for projects, particularly around retrofitting domestic properties. This policy has made residents and providers uncertain when it came to investing in energy efficiency measures in homes.

"Our grant schemes and other funding we offer such as contributions from developers, are helping our residents, communities and businesses save energy and to make 'green' choices where they can. We know that people need housing and jobs, and through our forthcoming joint local plan [currently draft], we are aiming to achieve that without damaging the climate. We will do this by using robust, evidence-based policies on carbon emissions, nature recovery and biodiversity.

"So we call on the government and our Oxfordshire council partners to discuss how we can rise to the challenge of being an area of growth while also reducing carbon emissions."

The council is accelerating its partnership with the other Oxfordshire authorities to help reduce district-wide emissions. It is supporting a number of projects including the decarbonisation of domestic housing, local area energy planning and electric vehicle charging infrastructure. In addition, the council's economic development team is encouraging businesses across the district to apply for its UKSPF-backed Business Decarbonisation Grant for up to £10,000 worth of support.

On 10th October Cabinet members will discuss two reports on the council's net zero targets - one for the council's own operations and the other for the district. These set out the progress so far and options for the future, as well as considering the various challenges and barriers to achieving the council's net zero goals.

The reports recommend that the council recognises the progress that has been made so far and adopts a revised operational net zero target of 2030, and a revised target for the district of 2045. The

revised targets better align with the other Oxfordshire councils and with the majority of other local authorities across UK.

Revising the targets should enable a smoother and potentially more cost-effective transition to net zero as technological advances are made for example in the waste vehicle market.

The council's cabinet meets to consider the reports on 10 October, and you can read the [agenda here](#).

For information about the [Business Decarbonisation Grant see our website](#).

Major next step towards creating accessible Wallingford Riverside

A boost of over £209,000 is being invested by SODC towards major accessibility improvements at Wallingford Riverside, and work on creating accessible moorings on the River Thames here is due to start this September.

The package of improvements has been designed to be step free to provide easy access to all types of river craft and to enhance the whole riverside as an attractive destination for residents, visitors, clubs and river users alike. Work will cover improvements to the existing access path, roadway, ramp and moorings at the riverside – in addition to the installation of an accessible pontoon at Wallingford Riverside Moorings, providing improved access for all visitors to the river including wheelchair users. Work is anticipated to commence from Friday 27 September for around 12 weeks (subject to weather conditions).

An experienced civil engineering firm, Greenford Ltd, based locally in Wheatley, will complete the work.

Work is also nearing completion, in a related project, to create a Changing Places accessible bathroom at the riverside, next to the existing toilet facilities - ready for the following season.

Whilst the moorings can be used by all, they are specifically designed to meet the requirements of the Wallingford Accessible Boat Club's wheelyboat, WOW-one, to enable disabled and less mobile people have equal access to the river. To contact the club for further support or guidance, visit www.wabc.org.uk

Alongside the work on the accessible moorings, another related project will be providing a new accessible club cabin, with access to water and electricity for use by Wallingford Accessible Boat Club. The ambition is to then create a cheerful artwork on the cabin to brighten up the area.

Please help to ensure voting is accessible for everyone

As part of a statutory review, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are looking at changing the locations of a number of the polling stations they use, to ensure they are accessible for everyone in future elections. Residents are being asked what they think of proposed changes.

The councils are particularly interested to hear from anyone who faced challenges in accessing a polling station during the 2024 General Election or Police and Crime Commissioner Election.

To find out more and to have your say, please go to southoxon.gov.uk/southpolling. Comments are open until **25 October 2024**.

Collaborative efforts to combat Anti-Social Behaviour

Early intervention, innovative projects and strong partnerships are playing a key role in helping to tackle anti-social behaviour and support vulnerable residents in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

The **latest Performance Report from the South and Vale Community Safety Partnership (CSP)**, which brings together public services including councils, the police, health services and housing providers, highlights examples of the work which had a positive impact across the community during 2023-24. These include:

- Engaging with young people involved in anti-social behaviour in Didcot. After local youth workers built a rapport with the group, they instead chose to take part in activities provided by Didcot Train.
- Increased patrols and outreach work with young people causing disturbances in Wantage which resulted in a reduction in anti-social behaviour.
- A review of areas prone to anti-social behaviour and criminality in Watlington led to new lockable gates on public toilets, upgraded CCTV and more patrols. This resulted in a decrease in issues locally and improved safety for residents.
- During the summer and Easter holidays, more than 500 youngsters attended skate park sessions aimed at deterring them from becoming involved with anti-social behaviour. The events, organised alongside the councils' Active Communities Team and skate experts ATBShop, received an overwhelmingly positive response from those taking part.
- Securing funding for an independent mediation service helped a number of families to work through anti-social behaviour-related neighbour disputes and resolve their issues.

As Cabinet Member for Communities, I can see that the collaborative efforts of the South and Vale Community Safety Partnership are having a very real impact in tackling anti-social behaviour. Rather than getting involved with activities which impact others and potentially harm their own future, thanks to early intervention, young people are instead trying positive activities and feeling a genuine part of their local community.

Supporting vulnerable people

The South and Vale CSP continues to provide vital support for some of our most vulnerable residents. Performances highlighting how grooming can occur helped to raise awareness among secondary school pupils of child sexual exploitation. Repairs and security works were provided for 64 victims of domestic abuse to help them feel safer in their homes; and covert cameras were also installed in dozens of homes to help protect those at risk of domestic abuse, burglary, anti-social behaviour or exploitation.

The partnership also continued to support vulnerable people when out and about. 99 premises are now signed up as 'Safe Places' to go to if someone is feeling threatened or harassed, and pubs and restaurants have also been encouraged to join the growing list of 'Ask for Angela' venues to ensure help will be available for anyone who feels unsafe or at risk of sexual violence while on an evening out.

OCC Home Upgrade Grant

Oxfordshire County Council is encouraging councillors at both county and district level to remind organisations that applications for Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2) funding will be closing soon. The deadline [to apply](#) is **31st October 2024**, so there's not much time left for Oxfordshire residents to take

advantage of this opportunity for FREE energy efficient home upgrades, and as yet there's been no future scheme announced.

The Home Upgrade Grant supports Oxfordshire residents at risk of fuel poverty by improving the comfort of their homes, often reducing their energy bills as a result. It also helps the Districts and the County Council move towards their net zero targets. The grant covers the cost of measures such as insulation, heating, ventilation, and solar panels, with residents able to receive up to £38,000 worth of work. To date we have completed upgrades in 140 properties since the start of the project in April 2023 and are on target to achieve a total of 215 completed homes by 31 March 2025.

The grant is available for homeowners and private renters who meet the following criteria:

1. The property's main heating source is not mains gas, i.e. they do not have a gas boiler.
2. Total household income of £39,000 or below OR be in receipt of means-tested benefits.
3. Their home has an EPC of D or below. If the resident's property doesn't have [a current EPC](#) then we can carry out a survey free of charge.
4. Live in South & Vale District, West Oxfordshire District or Cherwell District Council areas.