

District Councillor Report
Haseley Brook ward
29 May 2025



Cllr Georgina Heritage

My Meetings and Council Activity

May has been a busy month with the new council year beginning, and lots of activity within my portfolio such as working on SODC's developing arts and culture strategy, and attending the opening of Thame's fabulous new art trail. For the Haseley Brook ward specifically, further into this report I will focus on Haseley Trading Estate since, understandably, this is the subject I've received the most correspondence and meeting requests about over recent weeks.

Our first **full council meeting** of the year was the annual meeting of council on 15th May. With new members joining the Lib Dem administration following district byelections, it was an appropriate time for the Liberal Democrat group to make a friendly and respectful break from our formal partnership with the Green party. We have greatly enjoyed working with the Green group and will continue to do so, albeit from a different perspective... being the second largest party, they will now form the opposition at SODC!

Cllr Katharine Keats-Rohan was elected as chair of the council, taking over from Cllr Kellie Hinton. The Green Party's Cllr Andrea Powell was appointed as vice chair, in recognition of her hard work and excellent input when part of the administration.

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With two vacancies resulting from the dissolution of the Lib Dem-Green partnership, Leader Cllr David Rouane also confirmed his new cabinet. Cllr Tony Worgan joins the Cabinet as the member responsible for Economic Development and Regeneration. He previously served on several of the council's committees, including Scrutiny, Joint Audit and Governance and Planning. Cllr Leigh Rawlins returned as Cabinet Member for Corporate Services having previously had Cabinet roles as the member responsible for Planning and Finance. Alongside Corporate Services, Cllr Rawlins will be responsible for most of the Policy and Programmes service area, with Planning Policy remaining with Cllr Anne-Marie Simpson.

The new cabinet has been confirmed as:

- **Councillor David Rouane**— Leader, plus legal and democratic services and communications
- **Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers** – Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Hub
- **Councillor Tony Worgan**— Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration
- **Councillor Pieter-Paul Barker** – Cabinet Member for Finance and Property Assets
- **Councillor Georgina Heritage** – Cabinet Member for Communities
- **Councillor Sam James-Lawrie** – Cabinet Member for Environment

- **Councillor Leigh Rawlins** – Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Policy and Programmes
- **Councillor Anne-Marie Simpson** – Cabinet Member for Planning

Cllr David Rouane delivered his Leader's Report and said: "As we work towards delivering Local Government Reorganisation that will provide the best outcomes for our communities, this Cabinet will bring significant experience to help us continue to focus on priorities like getting our innovative Joint Local Plan adopted, and delivering more council-owned social housing."

In terms of my own activity within the ward over the past few weeks, as previously mentioned the **Haseley Trading Estate** proposal has generated the most work, activity and correspondence. I've recently received emails citing my "support for the change of use" of this site, and questioning the wisdom of the proposal in light of local government reorganisation. I always try to answer questions as comprehensively as possible in emails and meetings, particularly at parish councils' annual meetings with members of the public present, but I feel the above queries should be clarified for the benefit of parish councillors and residents reading this report.

To address support of the plan... I am fiercely protective of my ward and I always strive to do the best for residents, so I'd like to mention some of the areas of this proposal that make it nuanced rather than a black and white situation.

One of the most misunderstood factors seems to be about existing use and permissions. To clarify, there is no change of use involved in this proposal. Although named "Haseley Trading Estate", this is an industrial estate with all the uses and permissions this status entails. It would be very difficult to completely oppose permissions and uses that have existed here for many years.

One of the factors which made the site attractive to South and Vale councils was this very fact – it is a registered industrial site in terms of permissions - it requires no change of use. As a further example, another factor was electricity supply – there is a substation on the site. Some sites viewed by the councils would have required highly costly additional supply and connection. The councils also took on board that the adjoining woodland plus additional screening mean the site can be discreet and out of public view, which is preferable for most residents in any area.

The one main disadvantage of this site is of course that it sits on the edge of the South district which isn't ideal. However the councils considered over 400 possible sites and if a more centrally located estate with relevant permissions and accessibility had been available, they would have bought or leased it. This didn't happen; Haseley Trading Estate was unfortunately the only site that fitted the bill almost entirely, except for the location being further out than preferred.

Haseley Trading Estate was on the market anyway, and any industrial or logistics operator could have purchased it. Alternatively, a landlord could have purchased it who was looking to lease out individual units to different industrial trades, each with their own vehicles, operating times and environmental considerations. I have personal experience of a site like this in which the majority landlord has no interest whatsoever in the surrounding village or the noise, pollution and traffic activity generated from his industrial estate, as long as his tenants pay their rent. It's an ongoing battle for those who live near the site and, according to my own experience at least, it might be preferable to have the buck stop with a council rather than an uncaring landlord with multiple industrial businesses as tenants.

I remain particularly keen that concerns regarding traffic on the A329 will be addressed, particularly for the village of Little Milton. I've been having discussions about this with officers at every level at SODC, though it will evidently be OCC Highways which will lead on this. To this end, I will work with County Councillor Judith Edwards (Chalgrove & Thame West) to promote all possible mitigations to any traffic plan.

With regard to questions about the wisdom of the plan bearing in mind local government reorganisation, it is a statutory requirement to collect waste from households and, since the current Culham site lease will expire in 2026 and there is no opportunity to renew (the site is due to be developed), there was absolutely no alternative but to look for a new site for vehicles at this time.

No-one knows when LGR will happen in Oxfordshire. It is up to the government to advise, and we don't expect to know the direction the government wants us to take for some months, after which there will likely be a minimum of two years before the councils are migrated to a unitary authority. Neither do we know which proposal the government will prefer... there are three on the table for Oxfordshire. Our own leaning may be towards a smaller unitary, like the Ridgeway proposal of South, Vale and West Berks for example. However, Government may take a very different view and could opt for the county-wide proposal or the Greater Oxford proposal instead. It's all up in the air at the moment and it's in the hands of the government.

Whatever happens with local government reorganisation, bins will still need to be emptied and the vehicles will need to be parked somewhere. If the vehicle depot location turns out to be unsuitable for the new unitary authority, there will at least be an asset to sell.

So ultimately, this is not about me being in favour of the proposal; it's about me having to take on board the realities of the situation. Of course I would prefer it not to be in Haseley Brook... I can't think of any councillor who would choose to be in this position with residents.

What I do hope to do is remain engaged with the process and encourage all possible mitigations for the benefit of residents.

It's important to remember that the estate will not be used as a waste transfer site, just a vehicle depot, so my interest is in minimum disruption for surrounding villages in terms of traffic, and of course highways and pedestrian safety. As I mentioned previously, this is something I'm actively engaged in. I will continue to attend meetings with SODC officers and I will also engage with OCC Highways and the relevant county councillor.

Although all vehicles would be cleaned to mitigate environmental impact, I have also been requested by some residents to ask about extensive air quality surveys to safeguard against potential odours, which I did in a meeting with officers just this week.

I will strive for every mitigation and condition possible for the benefit of the surrounding villages, especially where Highways and traffic plans are involved. I do hope that in return residents can appreciate the position we're in, bearing in mind the councils' need to provide a vehicle depot for statutory operations when the Culham lease expires, plus of course the existing industrial permissions for this particular estate. This is not about me being supportive of the plan, it's about

trying to be as pragmatic as possible and finding ways to be genuinely effective. Any councillor would be up against the same difficulties in this position.

If I were to state I'm just outright against the proposal before the planning consultation process has even begun, or without considering the realities of the situation, I would just be grandstanding for the sake of popularity. That wouldn't be fair on anyone. It would also put me in a position of predetermination which could affect any subsequent voting influence I might have. I'm in this for the long haul and hope to be able to represent residents' interests throughout the process, so I need to approach the situation in a fair, honest and pragmatic way. I genuinely recognise the emotion that some people are feeling.

For the residents of Haseley Brook, I have and will continue to focus on material considerations and explore the art of the possible for residents. I am always willing to try and answer residents' questions, or else direct questions to the appropriate officers.

Planned IT Downtime

From Saturday 24 May, for at least a week, many of the Council's IT systems are unavailable to the public (and internally to services) as they are transferred to inhouse hosting.

This is a major piece of planned essential maintenance work on the council's IT systems and a crucial part of the move from Capita to inhouse IT. This approach is the only one that will work and maintain the integrity of the systems and data.

This work impacts a significant proportion of the council's services – for example, it won't be possible for people to view the planning registers and applications (or comment on applications) or submit land searches.

Where relevant, planning consultations will be **extended by 14 days** to accommodate the downtime.

The garden waste permit payment system is unaffected, as are council tax payments and the general customer enquiries form.

Capital Grant Scheme

The popular Capital Grant Scheme opens again on 2nd June (closes 25th July).

There's a total budget available of £320,000 to award for capital projects that take place in the district or within a three-mile radius of the district boundary. You can request a minimum of £5,000 and a maximum of £75,000 but no more than 50 per cent of your total project cost. Your total project cost must be at least £10,000 but no set maximum cost.

Town and parish councils, community groups and not-for-profit organisations are all eligible to apply. More information can be found here:

[Capital Grant Scheme 2025/26 - opening 2 June 2025 - South Oxfordshire District Council](#)

What do you think of our waste services?

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are inviting residents to have their say on how rubbish and recycling are handled across the districts.

A new waste services survey is now live, giving people the chance to share their experiences and opinions on everything from household waste and recycling collections to street cleaning and waste reduction initiatives. By taking part, residents can help shape the future of local waste services, highlighting what's working well and where improvements can be made.

Please take the survey by visiting southandvale.gov.uk/2025WasteSurvey

Comments are open until 13th June 2025.

This waste survey focuses on services provided by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils. It does not cover any questions relating to Household Waste Recycling Centres as these services are owned and managed separately by Oxfordshire County Council.