

District Councillor Report

Haseley Brook ward

5th February 2026

Cllr Georgina Heritage



What I've been doing - Meetings and Council Activity

Most council activity this month concerns both our upcoming budget and government proposed changes to planning processes. Councillors are also pleased to be working through our councillor community grant applications, though it's a tricky process this year as most wards are hugely oversubscribed. As a result, many councillors are having to be a little more "ruthless" than in recent years, focusing on organisations that have approached the ward member in advance and can demonstrate strong benefit to their specific ward. Each ward has £7,500 to allocate (a £2,500 increase on previous years) and as I've mentioned previously, I received around £30,000 of applications in Haseley Brook! Our decisions have to be returned to the Grants team by 12th February and while it's a difficult task, it's great to be able to support local causes.

In other Grants news, the **Community Infrastructure Levy Grant Fund** is now open. Town and parish councils and not-for-profit community groups in South Oxfordshire can apply for funding between **£75,000 and £250,000** to create or improve local community facilities. This is a chance to deliver the spaces and services our community needs, from community centres and sports or cultural facilities to parks and play areas. The new round of the grant funding will close for applications at 5pm on 30 March and you can find more information in our press release:

[£750,000 funding boost help South Oxfordshire's growing communities - South Oxfordshire District Council](#)

Regarding our **budget for the 2026/27 financial year**, SODC has been busy with preparations for 26/27 financial year. Under the Government's Fair Funding Review, the council is assessed as having a lower level of funding need than in previous years, which would normally result in a reduction in income. However, it is currently protected by the government 'funding floor', meaning transitional protection is applied so that core funding (government grant and council tax) does not fall below 2025/26 levels in the short term. This protection, alongside strong investment income, allows the council to set a balanced budget for now. Looking ahead, the position becomes more challenging: the funding floor is temporary, and the Medium-Term Financial Plan shows that once this protection ends the council becomes increasingly reliant on reserves from 2028/29 onwards.

For the upcoming financial year it is fair to say that SODC is in an enviable position, with no proposed cuts. Councillors are considering a number of revenue and capital growth bids as part of scrutiny, cabinet and full council meetings.

There is a lot of government **change to planning process** on the way, and councillors have been attending briefings on this subject this month. The Government is now seeking views on proposals for a [revised National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\) and other changes to the planning system](#).

SODC will be running an event for **Town and Parish Councils** on **Tuesday 3 March, 6:00pm – 7:30pm at Cornerstone Arts Centre, 25 Station Road, Didcot, OX11 7NE**

In addition to an introduction about current planning reforms, JLP and an update about our new planning IT system, there will be workshop sessions based around:

- Commenting on planning applications
- Enforcement
- Biodiversity
- General planning queries / questions

I very much encourage parish councils to attend if they can.

On matters of **planning enforcement**, I've been corresponding with the officer dealing with the multi plot field towards Stoke Talmage, in the Tetsworth parish. Enforcement clearly has an enormous and difficult task with the multiple ownership situation of these plots, but the team is working hard to deal with every single plot on the site that is causing issues, and I can confirm they are making significant and meaningful progress. As soon as notices / formal proceedings are served then all interested parties will be updated.

In my cabinet work, I chaired the statutory **Community Safety Partnership** on 3rd February, in which we received updates on domestic abuse, modern slavery & exploitation, serious violence and antisocial behaviour in South and Vale. We were also pleased to hear presentations from the excellent charity Bounce Back 4 Kids which supports young children affected by domestic violence, and TVP's Community & Diversity Officer in light of current community tensions.

I was also delighted to visit **Thame Players** theatre to see their refurbished dressing room which was funded by SODC's Performing Arts Grant. It was valuable to me to see the impact that the Performing Arts Grant can make, and heartwarming to talk about the important role this theatre plays in the cultural and community life of Thame and surrounding villages. Thame Players is entirely run by volunteers and they are always looking for help in all sorts of capacities and skill-sets (the acting side of things is just a small part of their operations!). They are a really friendly group of people and I would very much encourage anyone to get in touch if they are looking for a welcoming community volunteering opportunity. The theatre has an open day on Saturday 7th February, but you can make contact with them at any time if you'd like to find out more.



The next round of the Performing Arts Grant is likely to open in June with a deadline of the end of September (though dates have not yet been officially confirmed).

Joint Local Plan Update

A procedural meeting will be held on **Thursday 12th February 2026 in Meeting Room 1 of Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE commencing at noon**. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the way forward for the Examination in light of recent announcements surrounding the Duty to Co-operate. The Inspectors have provided a Note and Agenda for the meeting ([ID14](#)). Participation will be limited to the Inspectors and the Councils although interested parties are welcome to attend and observe should they wish to do so. The room will be limited in capacity, however it is intended that the meeting will be live streamed and these details will be released closer to the date on this Examination webpage.

Election Timetable Clarification

South Oxfordshire District Council elections **are not** affected by the election postponements set out in the [Written Ministerial Statement](#), and will still take place in 2027, in line with the normal elections timetable.

The 2027 elections will be for the new shadow authority, which will operate alongside the existing district and county councils during the one year transition period. **In 2028**, once the new unitary authority (or authorities) formally goes live, the current district and county councils will be dissolved.

Consultation: Private estate management arrangements

The UK Government consultation published on **18 December 2025** seeks views on how to reduce the prevalence of private estate management arrangements on housing estates in England, where communal infrastructure (like roads, green spaces and drainage) is maintained privately rather than being adopted by public authorities, leading to unfair charges and limited homeowner protections. It proposes measures to increase public adoption of estate amenities, introduce common standards, consider mandatory adoption for some infrastructure, remove financial incentives for non-adoption, and improve transparency and data on estate management arrangements, while inviting evidence on impacts for homeowners, developers, local authorities and management companies; [the consultation is open until 11:59 pm on 12 March 2026](#).

Residents affected by private estate management charges are strongly encouraged to respond to this consultation, as it is a key opportunity to share real-world experiences and help shape reforms that could improve long-term protections for homeowners.

South Oxfordshire District Council withdraws from X over safeguarding concerns

SODC has decided to remove its profile from the social media platform X following recent incidents involving the platform's integrated AI tool, Grok, which has been used to generate and share harmful content considered unacceptable and inconsistent with the council's values. The council had already significantly reduced its use of X due to its declining effectiveness in engaging local communities, but safeguarding concerns, particularly for women and children, prompted a complete withdrawal. Residents will continue to receive council updates through alternative channels including Facebook, Instagram, Threads, BlueSky, Nextdoor and WhatsApp, as well as via the council's website, email newsletters and local press and broadcast media, while SODC continues to explore new and emerging ways to communicate important service information.

South and Vale residents to keep using just one recycling bin

Residents in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse will be able to continue using a single wheelie bin for almost all their recycling, following confirmation that both districts won't need to change their services to meet a new national policy.

Under DEFRA's *Simpler Recycling* policy, from 31 March 2026 the default (but non-statutory) expectation is that councils introduce a separate container for paper and card in order to separate that material from other recycling, unless there are clear reasons not to. Any council wishing to collect paper and card in the same container as other dry recyclables, such as glass bottles, cans, tins and plastic tubs, must carry out a process known as a 'TEEP' assessment – this means examining whether separate collections would be *Technically, Environmentally or Economically Practicable*.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have now completed their TEEP assessments which concluded that introducing a separate collection for paper and card was not the right option for the districts.

As a result, the councils will continue with their all-in-one bin approach to dry recycling collections, meaning residents will *not* be asked to use additional recycling containers. The assessments will be kept under review in line with national policy developments.

There are also no plans to introduce fines for incorrect items placed in recycling containers. Although the councils very much encourage residents to check they are putting their waste into the correct bins.

Cllr Sue Cooper, Cabinet Member for Environment at South Oxfordshire District Council, said: "Our residents already recycle extremely well, and our current single bin system remains one of the best-performing in the country. The TEEP assessment makes it clear that adding more bins or boxes wouldn't offer any benefit for our district – in fact, it would increase costs and effort for residents. We can reassure people that they can continue recycling as they do now."

If you're not sure how to dispose of an item, please check at southandvale.gov.uk/checkit

Waste and Recycling Guides

New easy-to-read guides are available to help residents with waste and recycling, including bin usage, missed collections, and waste reduction. Paper copies will be provided to new homes. Guides are available for [houses with wheelie bins](#) and [flats/communal bins](#).

Energy Saving Measures

Updated [energy saving leaflets](#) provide guidance on insulation, air source heat pumps, and funding options including the Warm Homes Grant. For more information please visit our [website](#).

Pollutant levels fall by half at a site previously identified as having air quality issues

Air quality has improved significantly at several former pollution hotspots in South Oxfordshire, with nitrogen dioxide levels **falling by around 54% in Watlington** and **31% in Henley** since they were first identified as problem areas, and **Wallingford** already seeing its Air Quality Management Area revoked in December 2024. Monitoring over the past five years shows steady reductions in traffic-related pollution across all three

locations, meaning Henley and Watlington have now also met national air quality targets and will have their AQMAs removed in line with government guidance. The improvements reflect cleaner vehicle technologies and more electric cars on the road, and the council will continue to keep a close eye on air quality while encouraging walking, cycling, public transport and low-emission vehicles.

Air quality throughout the districts will continue to be monitored by the council's Environmental Protection Team through the existing diffusion tubes and analysers and the results will be available on the Oxfordshire-wide air quality website [oxonair.uk](https://www.oxonair.uk)

£2M boost for South leisure facilities

Leisure facilities in South Oxfordshire will receive a £2M boost over the coming year, with a number of improvements planned for council owned leisure centres.

South Oxfordshire District Council is funding these projects with developer contributions (S106 and CIL), their Capital budget and contributions from Oxfordshire County Council with £1,958,000 allocated to Abbey Sports Centre, Didcot Wave and Thame Leisure Centre.

Locally to the Haseley Brook ward, Thame Leisure Centre will be getting improved dry changing facilities. These include full refurbishments of the male and female changing areas and accessible toilets. Energy saving devices such as LED lighting and water saving devices will be installed. This work will help to enhance the user experience for all customers and open up areas of the centre so that they are more easily available for everyone to use and enjoy.

The projects follow on from others that have taken place at the centres in recent years including new studios at Didcot Wave (2025), Park Sports Centre, Abbey Sports Centre and Thame Leisure Centre all had gym equipment upgrades (2025), 150-solar panels were installed at Thame Leisure Centre (2025) and it's estimated the panels will produce 69,000 kWh of renewable electricity for the centre along with new LED lighting, an artificial turf pitch at Abbey Sports Centre for 5-a-side football (2024), Henley had new sauna and steam room facilities fitted (2023) and at Park Sports Centre in Wheatley, work is underway to install sustainable energy efficiency measures at the site which could make savings on energy bills and carbon emissions.

SODC started 2026 by announcing that we had secured an extended contract with our leisure providers GLL, who run the Better Leisure Centres across the district. We will work alongside GLL to provide these new and refurbished facilities over the next year.