

District Councillor Report

Haseley Brook ward

8th June 2026

Cllr Georgina Heritage

georgina.heritage@southoxon.gov.uk



Local Matters and what I've been doing

Our **Annual Meeting of Council** was held on 14th May and there are no changes to Cabinet. We elected a New Chair of Council, Andrea Powell of Benson and Crowmarsh, who I know will do a fantastic job representing the council around the district. She has chosen Style Acre and Cycling without Age as her two named charities for the municipal year.

There were [two motions](#) which came to council, one of which was my own – to oppose the abolition of HealthWatch as the independent voice of patients. As the district's Health representative I'm highly concerned about the government's proposal to abolish the statutory independent body that represents people who use health and social care services. I felt it was important to voice these concerns as a council, and I'm pleased to have received cross-party support. Please click on the hyperlink above if you are interested in reading my motion.

The second motion was to voluntarily adopt the so-called Socio-economic duty (part of Equalities Act 2010 s1), effectively giving statutory footing for the council to consider socio-economic disadvantage alongside the other nine protected characteristics when making strategic decisions and as part of impact assessments.

Full details of the [meeting and motions are available on the council's website.](#)

On **local planning matters**, the appeal against the refusal of planning application P25/S1430/O - **land at Watlington Road Lewknor** (up to 25 homes) was heard in Wallingford on 3rd June. I attended in full and spoke at as ward member, and I was joined by representation from the neighbourhood plan group and the parish council. Some Lewknor residents also attended for part of the day. I'd like to express my sincere thanks to neighbourhood plan and parish council members for working collaboratively with me on this so that we could agree a unified approach and position. I realised at the hearing just how important prepared local representation is. The planning officer inevitably doesn't have the local knowledge that we all do, and I feel we made an extremely valuable contribution to

the hearing. However the main thrust of the appellant's barrister's case was based on the government's new housing targets and NPPF, which we anticipated would be the case, and which we know carries more ultimate weight than local policies. Also, some of the strongest arguments against the design of the development were not permitted as material to the appeal, due to the application being Outline rather than Full. I made the point that this wasn't an entirely fair situation since previous objections and amendments had resulted in this design being the only likely way forward in any event. However, since all matters were reserved save for access, there were limitations on the points that could be accepted by the Inspector. The Inspector made an unaccompanied visit to the site after the hearing, and we asked him to consider particular local priorities/concerns during his visit.

Regarding the traffic route plan for **Haseley Industrial Estate**, I've received further correspondence from the surrounding parish councils and appreciate their need to stay on top of this consideration. I have written to the relevant planning officer (copying the Heads of Environment and Corporate Landlord, the planning committee chair and cabinet member Cllr Sue Cooper) requesting further information on the route plan at the earliest opportunity.

I mentioned last month that **Beard Construction** are keen to work with the primary schools to look at machinery and construction, and also sessions on safety. Great Milton Primary School responded and arranged a session with Beard on 5th June. It would be great if other primary schools might like to take advantage of this opportunity and I'd be very happy to be contacted direct about it.

SODC runs the **SO Charitable Lottery** and each year the central community fund from the lottery is distributed to the Good Causes selling 20 tickets a week or more. I'm really pleased that in the Haseley Brook ward, Oxfordshire Animal Sanctuary and Little Milton Village Community Shop have both benefitted this year. Please spread the word on this charitable lottery, as there may be other community good causes that could benefit from selling lottery tickets.

Finally, SODC have made a statement regarding swimming in **Chinnor Quarry (Old Kiln Lakes)** in response to a BBC enquiry: *"Thames Valley Police have provided a statement regarding Chinnor Quarry and we would always urge residents to follow the advice of the relevant authorities on water safety, such as TVP and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.*

If people do wish to swim outdoors they can do so safely, and with supervision, now and throughout the summer at Riverside Pool in Wallingford - for more information residents can visit [Better's Riverside Park and Pools webpage](#)."

I'm including this in my District report because it's very local to the Haseley Brook ward. It is also particularly pertinent bearing in mind the tragic loss of life in the quarry last year. I've covered the concerns and advice more fully in my Chinnor division County report, including advice from the Fire & Rescue service which can be found here: [Oxfordshire fire and rescue crews provide water safety advice](#)

Chinnor Quarry's water is **not** a "blue lagoon" as claimed in social media from outside of the area. It is very toxic, very deep and very dangerous.

Council Matters

Our ever-popular **Capital Grant scheme** is open again! £320,000 is available to community groups and voluntary organisations in the district for projects such as playgrounds, community cafes and energy efficiency improvements to community buildings.

Applicants can request grants of a minimum of £5,000 and a maximum of £75,000 but no more than 50 per cent of the total project cost. Applications need to show how the project will help improve the quality of life for people in South Oxfordshire through projects that support thriving, healthy and inclusive communities, provide infrastructure that meets local need, that take action on climate change and nature recovery, and improve participation, accessibility and accountability.

The deadline for applications is midday **Monday 20 July** and more details can be found on the council's website southoxon.gov.uk/grants

Organisations needing help with their application can contact the Community Enablement Team – grants@southandvale.gov.uk

To give an idea of the types of projects awarded funding, here are the successful ones from the last round:

- Anne Carpmael Trust CIO – £16,252 Boardwalk project (southern route)
- Warborough & Shillingford Parish Council – £75,000 Village Hall refurbishment
- The Forge (Binfield Health) – £38,000 The Forge refurbishment and conversion
- Abingdon Rugby Club – £20,315 Female changing room project
- Holton Village Hall – £7,142 HVH solar energy system
- Watlington Sports Club – £3,523 Replacement windows and doors
- Kenton Theatre Management Society Ltd – £20,315 Stage lighting upgrade
- The Berin Centre – £75,000 Sustainability and access at The Berin Centre
- Earth Trust – £14,453 New bicycle shelters with e-bike charging
- Wheatley Parish Council – £50,000 Church Road recreation ground refurbishment

SODC has now signed the new **Waste Collection Contract** with Biffa ahead of the July start date. Although the contractor is the same, SODC now owns the vehicles as well as the waste vehicle depot. The contract is designed to be flexible so that the successor authority can review how to best deliver the service after Local Government Reorganisation. The contract is for a minimum of 8 years, Maximum of 16, with a break clause after 4.

And on waste services, residents have been encouraged to complete the annual [waste and street cleaning](#) survey before 4th June 2026.

As expected, there is a huge amount of work going on with **Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution**. Since the consultation period on the three proposals for LGR ended, officers across Oxfordshire (and West Berkshire) have continued collaborative work to prepare for the transition phase following the Secretary of Decision which is **due in July**. Work has focused on gathering baseline information across finance, HR, property, contracts, customer services and IT systems to support future transition arrangements.

Officers have also been reviewing how the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has approached reorganisation elsewhere, including draft Structural Change Orders.

At South Oxfordshire, work is progressing on programme structures, resourcing plans and work packages to support both local government reorganisation and devolution requirements.

Meetings on **Devolution** (the step following LGR) have continued to take place, HOWEVER the inclusion of Swindon has continued to be thorny issue. Leaders have shared concerns about it not being part of health and police structures, and impact of what adding another town that scores high on the indices of multiple deprivation could mean for tackling rural deprivation in Oxfordshire and Berkshire. It is safe to say that it is unlikely that the Thames Valley would reach the unanimity required by the now ex minister of devolution. I am of the view that in order to power ahead with a strategic authority, by far the easiest thing would be for Oxfordshire and Berkshire to go it alone for the time being.

Work on **Joint Local Plans** is ongoing, with a recent review of the timetables. South and Vale's Joint Local Plan 2041 is currently being examined by government-appointed inspectors: The first stage of hearing sessions took place in June 2025, and the second stage of hearing sessions is programmed to take place on 7 to 9 July 2026, followed by further hearings in the autumn.

New government requirements mean the councils will need to start work on the next local plan before the independent examination on the last one is finished! So, at the same time as working towards adopting the first Joint Local Plan, the councils are required to start preparing their next plan or plans for the area, which would run to 2045. This is known as 'twin-tracking'.

Cost-of-living support and advice is available at our upcoming Community Hub roadshows, with South Oxfordshire dates to be announced over the summer.

From May to December this year, the Community Hub Team from South and Vale councils will be visiting local community organisations across the districts on their cost-of-

living roadshow. Council officers will be on hand to provide advice on housing support, energy and heating grants, and other ways to help manage household costs.

The roadshows also give residents a chance to share feedback to the councils and help shape future support and services.

Members of the public will be welcome to drop in to the roadshow venues at any time, no bookings are required. Details are being shared on the councils' social media platforms and websites.

Cost of living support is also available for residents with oil-fuelled heating who are struggling with the cost of buying more fuel. They may be eligible for support through the [Oxfordshire Crisis Support Scheme | Oxfordshire County Council](#)

Those not eligible for financial support through this scheme can still access help by contacting [Better Housing Better Health](#) for free warmth and wellbeing advice, energy-saving support and information on other fuel grants.